

# Virginia Railway Express

## Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, October 3rd at 12 noon.



There are currently 75 questions waiting to be answered.

**VRE Management:**

Good Afternoon Everyone!

I'm sorry Dale couldn't be here, but I'm happy to have a chance to chat with all of you.

There are a lot of good questions and I'll answer as many as I can.

As a quick introduction -- I'm Jennifer Straub VRE's Deputy CEO. I've been with VRE for about six years. So, let's get going!

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**Wendy from Woodbridge, VA asks:**

Last Tuesday, we had to wait about 45 minutes for a juice train to pass us on the Fredericksburg line. Do commuters not have top priority? Thanks

**VRE Management:**

The whole incident could have been avoided if a switch hadn't malfunctioned. In the interest of traffic flow in the area, the Juice Train was dispatched in order to allow VRE trains to bypass the problematic switch. While frustrating, we don't disagree with the decision that CSX made.

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**Robin from Woodbridge, VA asks:**

How often are schedule changes/updates done? Will there be any schedule changes in 2007? What about 2008?

**VRE Management:**

Schedule changes are often done twice a year in October and April. This month's change is nominal with just some changes to which trains are "S" trains.

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**B from Manassas asks:**

Hi Jennifer, Why is it that the ticket vendor at Union Station does not have the ability to process credit and debit cards for VRE ticket purchases. I believe it has been around six months since they've had a hookup, and the guy told me this month that he doesn't believe they will ever get one. I'd rather have the status quo than no vendor at Union Station for me to trade in MetroChecks, but it would make sense to make things more convenient by installing the hookup and not forcing customers to carry sometimes over \$100 in cash.

**VRE Management:**

Good question! We are working on a getting a new card unit to the vendor in Union Station. We hope to have one in sometime this month.

Even though it should be a simple matter, the replacement process has taken so long because we had to find a new type of card reader and have it certified by the company that handles all the processing of our credit/debit sales. Earlier this year (without any warning) the manufacturer of the card readers used in our vendor ticket machines stopped making units compatible with our equipment. As a result, our fare collection manufacturer had to help us locate new units that will work with our system. Once we found the units, they had to then be certified for use in the U.S. and now we are waiting for final approval by our credit/debit processor so that we can put it in service.

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**Beverly from Burke, VA** asks:

How long do we have to turn in the Burke Shuttle Rebate punch cards? I know that I am not the only one who has months and months worth that need to be sent in for the rebate. Also thank you to the Burke Shuttle drivers they are terrific.

**VRE Management:**

As you can imagine, our accounting department would prefer that we receive the rebate cards no later than 60 days after they have been completed. However, we will honor those that are from earlier times. Getting them in sooner, rather than later benefits everyone.

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**Judith from King George, Virginia** asks:

At Leeland Road Station, the parking lot is quite large and there is even an overflow lot, but spaces set aside for handicapped drivers are very few. When I arrive around 7 a.m., all the handicap spaces are full. Would it be possible to add four or five more? The percentage of handicap spaces appears to be quite small, compared to the overall capacity of the 2 lots. I have been riding VRE for 6 years and love it.

**VRE Management:**

The number of ADA spaces provided at all of our stations is established based on ADA guidelines. Unfortunately, in situations where there are capacity issues, we aren't able to make these kinds of changes.

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**Todd from Bristow, VA** asks:

The TVMs seem to be a perpetual problem. Monday, two of the three machines at Broad Run wouldn't take credit cards. The line was all the way back to the parking lot, so I just used my last FRC instead of holding up the line. Then at Crystal City, the touch-screens were unresponsive. VRE must recognize that this is terribly frustrating. We complain month after month about them, but nothing changes. All this, while standing under a large "\$150 Fine" warning...

**VRE Management:**

Thanks for letting me know. Even though the card readers were checked at Broad Run last week, I'll make sure that we have someone look at them again. I'll also have someone check on the screens for the four machines at Crystal City.

As you may know, we are working to replace all the credit card readers in our machines. The same goes for the touch screens.

Even though we check our equipment every day before service, problems can occur as the day goes on. So that we can better address malfunctioning equipment, we would appreciate you taking the time to submit a TVM Information form (found at <http://www.vre.org/feedback/tvmconcerns.php> on our website) when you notice ongoing problems. This way we can work with our two fare collection technicians to remedy situations as quickly as possible.

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**Rose from Triangle, VA** asks:

Why was train #304 so late reaching Franconia/Springfield this AM? No explanation was given as to why we were so slow. Thank you.

**VRE Management:**

This morning, most trains (including Amtrak) were subjected to efficiency tests. These are in the field tests on the crews that operate our trains.

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**Larry from Dale City, VA** asks:

Are train engineers allowed to smoke while driving a train? I thought I saw one smoking a cigar while driving train

300 the other morning.

**VRE Management:**

No one is permitted to smoke on our trains -- passengers or crew. If you see this in the future, please let us know by submitting an email to "Gotrains@vre.org" so that we can address the situation.

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**Marianne from Burke, VA asks:**

It appeared that the conductors on last night's Train 309 had no instructions, tools, or training on how to manually close the handicapped ramp when it malfunctioned. In the end, five passengers ended up figuring out how to close the device. It concerns me that conductors were not able to deal with the situation and wonder what other safety procedures they are not aware of. What is being done to correct this?

**VRE Management:**

The wheel chair lift on 309 last night had a major malfunction. We are investigating the cause.

From initial reports, the events that caused the failure went beyond the scope of normal operational training. That said, we will work with Amtrak to make sure that our crews are better prepared for these unusual situations.

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**Lorraine from Stafford, VA asks:**

I would your comments on the FRED bus link from Spotsylvania commuter lots to the Fredericksburg VRE station. How can the VRE support this service when Spotsylvania continues to refuse to join the VRE. I am incensed that Spotsylvania County residents receive more services than Stafford County residents, when Stafford County has paid more than its share of annual contributions to the VRE, and Spotsylvania pays nothing.

**VRE Management:**

This shuttle service is operated by FRED and is funded through a grant received by the Fredericksburg Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (FAMPO). This organization serves not only Fredericksburg and Stafford, but also Spotsylvania, among others. VRE is making no financial contribution to this service. However, we elected to notify our passengers in the hopes that some Spotsylvania residents would use it -- freeing up parking spaces in Fredericksburg.

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**Cindy from Burke, VA asks:**

Any chance that we could get some vending machines at some of the stations? Soda and water would be nice for when the trains are delayed.

**VRE Management:**

Vending machines are a good idea! Unfortunately, since the stations are not manned, vending machines would be subject to vandalism. This is why our ticket machines do not take cash.

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**Jeff from Springfield, VA asks:**

I am a rider on the Manassas line and have noticed that VRE trains always "blow their horn" prior to going over the bridge at Lake Accotink. Is this necessary? I know that it freaks out park wildlife. As a note: I've noticed that CSX trains don't do this prior to their approach to the bridge.

**VRE Management:**

Because this goes through a park, Norfolk Southern instituted a rule for trains to sound their horns to alert nearby pedestrians that a train is coming through the area.

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**Donnie from Fredricksburg, VA asks:**

It has come to my attention that the two conductors on train 310 are over overzealous when it comes to checking tickets. I remember you mentioning that tickets were checked randomly. For some reason both of these guys seem to think that everyone is cheating the system and it's become annoying. I understand it's their job, but come on give us a little breathing room will ya? Everyday they are grilling riders constantly.

**VRE Management:**

While tickets are checked randomly, our CEO recently instructed Amtrak to increase ticket checking on all trains.

This has come about, in part, because of passenger comments about the visibility of ticket checking during service.

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**John from Washington, DC** asks:

Any progress towards the goal of having conductors actually check passengers' tickets?

**VRE Management:**

As you can see, even with an increase in ticket checking, some passengers still want to see more.

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**Gunny from Spotsylvania** asks:

VRE prohibits alcoholic beverages on the platforms (drinking in public, understood) but not on its trains. Is there an answer for this policy in place? Problems in the past, rider complaints etc...

**VRE Management:**

Alcoholic beverages are prohibited on our platforms and our trains. If you notice otherwise, please let us know.

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**Cat Hitt from King George VA** asks:

Are there any plans to implement feeder buses (FRED) from King George to VRE? I board at Leeland because of the parking issue in Fredericksburg. Would like to see feeder buses from King George to either Fredericksburg or Leeland VRE.

**VRE Management:**

As we said previously, VRE does not fund the feeder service. If you are interested in feeder service from your area, the best place to start would be to speak to your local elected officials.

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**John Pelak from San Antonio Texas** asks:

What is the best transportation from Quanico to Washington DC? Bus or Train What are the web sites for these transportation?

**VRE Management:**

I think it's VRE! For more information on our service visit [www.vre.org](http://www.vre.org) on the web.

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**Timely from It's Falmouth, Not Fredericksburg, Va.** asks:

The new monitors look awesome, but there could be a lot more information on those giant screens. How about including the time? Put the GPS system map up so we could see where trains are. However, this wouldn't do any good at Leeland Station because the monitors don't work.

**VRE Management:**

Once the project is complete and all of the new signs are working, the next step is to see if we can put "Rail Time" on the screens.

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**Bruce from Fairfax Station, VA** asks:

I ride VRE daily and frequently, public announcements are made on the trains and at the station, yet there are no accommodations at all for hearing impaired patrons. Burke Center station has an electronic display board but it never is used. The trains have nothing. Union Station has antiquated methods. Can something be done to accommodate those that can't hear?

**VRE Management:**

All of our new rail cars will have visual displays that correspond with the automated announcements. We are in the process of implementing the new signs at Burke Centre. Hopefully, this will help as well.

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**AI from Manassas, VA** asks:

When you get the new gallery cars in December, will you put them in place of the Bombardier cars? Then you can return the Bombardier cars to Sound Transit.

**VRE Management:**

We currently have one six car set in service and have authorization to keep it until June, 2008. While we don't expect to keep this trainset in service that long, we will have to receive more shipments of new cars before we can comfortably send the Sounders back.

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**Ken from Burke, VA** asks:

I realize VRE doesn't manage the EZ Bus at Burke. Who should I contact over such issues?

**VRE Management:**

Since we work with Fairfax County on this service, please send us your concerns and we will forward them to the County.

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**Karen from Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

Why does CSX (or FRA, or whoever) insist on conducting speed checks, or compliance tests, such as the nonsense that occurred on the tracks this morning (Train 309 was affected), during peak commuter hours? It is absurd to travel slower than slime ooze when the purpose of such public transportation is to facilitate \*on-time\* passenger movement to places of business. The CSX Dispatcher can calculate speeds from when trains depart from one station and arrive at the next. What can be done to balance the need for such tests and checks with the need for non-interference during peak commuter hours?

**VRE Management:**

Efficiency tests are mandated by the Federal Railroad Administration. We know it's inconvenient, but these tests are done to ensure your safety. Check our VRE Update archives for more information on this subject.

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**Steve from Fredericksburg** asks:

Good Afternoon: Why doesn't VRE offer at least "S" schedule service the day after Thanksgiving? Many Federal Employees must work this day. Can monthly passholders buy \$10 Amtrak stepups for use on No-VRE-Service days? Thanks.

**VRE Management:**

VRE eliminated Holiday service several years ago due to budget constraints. You are welcome to use cross-honor Amtrak trains on those days provided you have a step-up ticket, your VRE ticket has the correct zones and the Amtrak train is not sold out.

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**Bob from Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

The current bus transportation connection service from Lorton to south Fort Belvoir takes about 1 to 1.5 hours....this is for a distance of about 5 miles. I'd like to see a connection service much like what "FRED" has started doing in Spotsylvania/Fredericksburg at the cost of \$1 per trip. Is this something VRE can take the lead on or collaborate with Metro Bus and/or the Fairfax Connector/REX to effect?

**VRE Management:**

While VRE isn't able to fund shuttle service, our planning department is actively working with Fairfax County and BRAC officials on improving connectivity between the Lorton station and Fort Belvoir.

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**Joe from Stafford, VA** asks:

What is the official monthly ticket policy for the new month? I had understood you could use it for the morning commute and not the evening leg. Last night, the conductors stated that it was good for the entire day. Which is correct?

**VRE Management:**

A few years ago, we had thought about reducing the grace period for the Monthly to just the morning service. However, we ultimately decided to leave it where it was -- which is the entire first service day of the month.

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**JB** from **Bealeton, VA** asks:

This is also an answer to the comment from the guy who complained about the conductors checking tickets. If he and other riders would put their tickets on top of seat in front of them (they have ticket holders) the conductor would not have to bother them as they check the tickets.

**VRE Management:**

A suggestion from a fellow passenger. . .

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**Markus** from **Fredericksburg** asks:

Why not have an open forum rather than pick and choose what questions to answer... You can still have a moderator...

**VRE Management:**

We administer the on-line forum this way because we get a lot of duplicate questions. Unfortunately, we also get some inappropriate content.

I want to assure you that we read every question and, if necessary, take action even if we don't respond here.

For those of you on #337 -- we hear you loud and clear.

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**VRE Management:**

I had a great time. But, Dale is on his way back to the building -- so, we'd better get out of his office!

I know he missed not taking part in the chat today --- but he'll be back next month!

Jen

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