

Virginia Railway Express

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Thursday, August 14th at 12 noon.



There are currently 43 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Welcome! Sorry I am late, I got hung up in another meeting, but wanted to make sure I made it to this chat with you.

VRE Management:

We have had some technical difficulties. I'll be back in just a moment.

Alexandra from Rippon asks:

Just a note to the new riders: stay with VRE! I've only been riding about a year, but has made commuting so much easier despite the delays, the vast majority of which VRE has probably has no control over. Yes, the delays are annoying, but a delay of 10-15 minutes is better than a 2 hour sit on I-95! Only suggestion for VRE's personnel, any chance there can be a quicker notification of delays, even if the exact nature/extent of the delay is not known?

VRE Management:

Thank you! I know that communication when delays occur is important to our riders. That's why we have the Train Talk email system, "Rail Time" on our website, as well as station announcements and staff available from 7:00 am – 7:00 pm on service days.

Since many of the situations that cause delays for our trains are constantly changing, we do not issue delay notifications until at train is at least 10 minutes late. Many times providing information about delays of less than 10 minutes can result in confusion for those waiting further down the line.

Bonnie from Manassas, VA asks:

Does courtesy on the Quiet Car include newspaper reading? This may sound unreasonable, but many people on the morning Quiet Car turn and fold their newspaper pages so loudly and harshly that it is actually more disturbing than low-volume talking. Many readers also hold their papers so far from them that the papers brush the heads of the people in front of them. When I read newspapers on the quiet car, I try to turn the pages gently and hold them close to me and away from the passenger in the seat in front of me. Can the VRE request gentle newspaper reading?

VRE Management:

The quiet car has been popular for many. However, "quiet" does not mean "silent." While newspaper rattling can be annoying, there is little we can do about this situation.

Rob from Haymarket asks:

I think we should keep some chainsaws on the train so the conductors can clear the debris after a storm faster

VRE Management:

They do have some tools, but some trees are simply too big for our crews to handle safely. Instead, they have to wait for the tree to be removed by the host railroad.

Angie from Manassas, VA asks:

First I'm sure you will get asked about this a couple of times today, but is there a new expected date for the Manassas garage? Last word was end of July which has come and gone. Can see them putting finishing touches on, but wondered when we can start parking there? (It's sooo close to the platform) Also, I've given up sending in emails about the temperatures in the new cars, but will there ever be thought given to changing the A/C settings in those cars? It's very difficult to sit comfortably while 68 degree air blows at your head for an hour.

VRE Management:

The project manager for the Manassas parking garage tells me that we are waiting on the completion of a few "punch list" items so that we can receive a final inspection by the City. I expect that the garage will be open by the end of this month.

NRM from Manassas asks:

I'm enjoying the new cars and look forward to seeing more of them on the various train sets that I ride. One of your advertising points is the ability to work on the train during the commute. So I was wondering if during the design process you ever considered adding drop-down tables, similar to those on airline seats. At least the Sounder cars had tables. Balancing a laptop or paperwork on your knees gets cumbersome.

VRE Management:

Having tables in the new rail cars was one amenity originally considered. However, in the interest of providing as many seats as possible and keeping the cost down, we opted not have them installed.

Tom from Fairfax, VA asks:

Why don't you force the General Assembly's hand on the funding issue by doing some deficit spending? If you add extra trains and order new locomotives in the absence of state funding, won't they be obligated to give you the monies needed quickly?

VRE Management:

VRE is not directly funded by the General Assembly, so it is under no obligation to help us with our budget. Details on VRE's organizational structure and funding may be found on our web site at <http://www.vre.org/about/index.htm>.

Lori from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Can I bring my bike on the train?

VRE Management:

Currently, VRE only allows collapsible bikes on our trains. Once we have all of the new rail cars in service, we will be reviewing that policy to possibly allow full-size bikes on board.

Jessica from Gainesville asks:

Please help if you can! VRE has no control over this situation, but it is getting to be a major point of frustration when going to the Broad Run station. Any chance that CSX can at least be informed of the following problem? One-two times a week, a freight train blocks the tracks at one of the Broad Run entrances between 4:45-5:00 am. It just sits there, with the gates down, about 10 cars from being totally clear. This train will sit there for up to 15 minutes, and cause many to almost miss Traing 322. If you come upon the scene with the gates down, and then immediately detour, it will add 10-15 minutes, and result in a missed train. The freight train normally clears, but barely in time, and with no regularity. On 13 Aug, the train finally did not clear in time, causing many of us to pull up to Broad Run just as 322 was leaving (and the conductors seeing a huge rush of cars in the parking lot but still taking off). This is very frustrating! Any chance this can be mentioned and see if the train has to stop, can it stop another couple hundred feet further and NOT block the road?? Going to Piper Lane from West on 28 is not even an option, as there is so much traffic going East that its impossible to turn left onto Piper without waiting 20

minutes for a car to let you turn.

VRE Management:

While I can't make any promises, I can see if it might be possible for Norfolk Southern to look into this since it is their train and railroad. In the meanwhile (since Piper Lane is not an option), you may wish to consider using the alternate route from the Prince William County Parkway. A map is available on our web site at <http://www.vre.org/service/stations/BRUparking.htm>.

Amber from Quantico, VA asks:

Any chance you all will fix the ticket machines anytime soon? I have had several issues purchasing tickets and as a result, I have missed trains. And I had arrived at the station with plenty of time to spare. It is getting very frustrating. And just so you know, there was a long line at the vendor so I wasn't able to purchase tickets there either.

VRE Management:

I will have our Fare Collection Manager look into the situation. However, he needs more information to address your problems. Please submit a TVM Information Form with your daytime contact information and a few details on the problems you are experiencing. The form can be found on our web site at <http://www.vre.org/feedback/tvmconcerns.php>.

Ed from Fairfax, VA asks:

Is it possible to improve the signage in the Burke garage? It is very difficult to determine which direction the rows go and/or which ones go in both directions.

VRE Management:

I will talk to Fairfax County (who constructed the garage) and see if there can be any improvements to the signs.

Freddiesburg from VA asks:

I thought that CSX was supposed to put the commuter trains during rush hours ahead of their freight trains. Why then, are we having issues with "traffic congestion" during rush hour?

VRE Management:

Traffic congestion can be caused by more than just freight trains. Amtrak trains have been a source of track congestion -- especially when leaving Union Station.

Joe from Stafford VA asks:

What is the status of adding additional routes to and from DC? A later departure after 7pm would be appreciated.

VRE Management:

With our current funding situation, we are unable to our service.

Mike from Springfield, VA asks:

The windscreens VRE installed at L'Enfant plaza early this year, have gotten pretty dirty. Will VRE clean them?

VRE Management:

I'll have them cleaned. Thanks for letting me know.

Andy from Broad Run asks:

Yesterday, for the first time in 10 years of riding VRE, I saw a conductor writing two tickets for passengers who were trying to ride without validating their ten-trip passes. I think that's great, but in each case the incidents were so low-key, I doubt few passengers knew what had occurred--and that's a shame, because in my opinion the biggest benefit of ticket writing is the deterrent effect it has on other would-be fare-beaters. Is there some way you could publicize such ticketing, perhaps by providing monthly statistics comparable to the on-time numbers you publish each month?

VRE Management:

I am emphasizing ticket checking with the crews and will continue to do so. I'll look into the possibility of providing information, but I'm not sure if we can.

Bonnie from VA asks:

When is the VRE going to accept the SMARTTRIP cards? Our agency is making us use these and until VRE accepts them we have to pay \$6.50 every month to commuter direct to mail us paper VRE passes.

VRE Management:

Don't worry about shipping cost. VRE will continue to cover the expense. However, I have asked Commuter Direct to use U.S. Mail instead of an express service to reduce the cost to VRE. There should be no change in mail time.

Jean from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

From your daily download page, how do you determine the ON TIME PERFORMANCE percentages for Fredericksburg and Manassas Lines. For example on Aug 11, Manassas #330 was delayed 19 minutes, resulting in an on time performance of 93.8% -- how did you get this number?

VRE Management:

Glad you asked. Total On-Time performance is in the Daily Download is calculated by the taking the number of trains that were five or fewer minutes late in reaching their final destination and dividing that number by the total number of trains operated on that line that day.

Since the Manassas line only had one train delayed more than five minutes on August 11 and we operated 16 Manassas line trains that day – OTP for the Manassas line was 93.8% that day.

Michele from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

As a Leeland Road rider, I would like to know what plans VRE has for expanding the parking lot. It is at capacity now on Tuesday's thru Thursday's even with the usual vacationing absentees.

VRE Management:

VRE is working with Stafford County to identify the costs and feasibility of expanding the Leeland Road parking lot, as well as Brooke. We'll have more details in the spring.

DEB from Fredricksburg asks:

Good Afternoon! I continue to complain about the filth of the Fredericksburg Station. Every morning gagging as you go up the stairs, afraid to touch anything in fear of catching something. So now I ask: Who do I need to contact to get this matter taken care of. We are tired of the conditions we are forced to deal with every day.

VRE Management:

The City of Fredericksburg is responsible for the maintenance of the station. We continue to our riders' concerns about the station with them. You may wish to contact them as well.

Deb from Stafford, VA asks:

I have enjoyed the care free alternative to the 95 corridor for 5 years now -- Thank you. I board at Quantico with a destination of King street and always use a monthly ticket. For next week only I will be riding the entire distance with a destination of Union Street. Do I need to supplement my monthly ticket with a King St-to-Union Station ticket? Please advise.

VRE Management:

Yes, you will need to supplement your monthly ticket. Please call one of our customer service reps to discuss your options. 703-684-1001.

Shoes with Coffee Stains!! from **Quantico, VA** asks:

Just a statement. On the 306 on Tuesday, a female soldier (whose last name I will leave out) dropped her coffee and it went all over the floor and my tennis shoe. She barely cleaned up the spill on the floor with a newspaper and did not really seem like she was sorry for spilling coffee on my shoe. After washing them Tuesday night, they rubbed blisters on my heels yesterday. I am already pregnant, don't need blisters, too! I had to buy new tennis shoes last night! The ones that were ruined were \$120 and the ones I bought last night were \$80. Needless to say, I am a tad irritated. So, riders, please be mindful of your beverages. If an accident should happen, take responsibility and try to make the situation right.

VRE Management:

A good tip from a fellow rider. We're all on the train together, so let's continue to be courteous towards each other.

Darkman from **Falmouth, Va.** asks:

I really like the darkness so it is easier to sleep in the morning, but could you have them turn the lights out after I've finished reading the paper? What's the deal with the engine losing auxiliary power so often? It was daily for a while.

VRE Management:

If you are referring to the recent problems with train set that operates as #302 and #305, the locomotive was removed from service until the problem could be corrected.

Tammy from **Springfield** asks:

Might it be possible for you to remind the riders of common courtesy - specifically, two things. Driving safely in parking lots (I've almost been hit by folks rushing out of the Rolling Road lot several times) and cell phone use (please...think back to kindergarten...use your indoor voice!). Thank you for keeping VRE the enjoyable way to commute.

VRE Management:

These are already in our Courtesy Campaign. I'll see what I can do about stepping up the frequency of reminders on these topics.

Erv from **fredericksburg, va** asks:

Are you going to install a place to lock up motorcycle during the day at fredericksburg or Leeland

VRE Management:

We are providing motorcycle spaces at both lots. Brooke now has motorcycle spaces with the recent re-stripping. I'll continue to monitor this and see if expansion of this program is needed.

David from **Rippon, VA** asks:

Now that ridership is up, has VRE made more money?

VRE Management:

Ridership is up 10% and so is fare revenue, but we don't make money. Fares cover roughly 50-60% of our operating costs, which are also increasing.

Steve from **Burke** asks:

Why is it that the new ticket machines are still not in service? Why should it take the use of 2-3 credit cards per attempt to get the machines to recognize a valid CC and produce a ticket? Isn't this a potential 'revenue reduction' issue with VRE?

VRE Management:

There are no current plans to put a new fare collection machines at our stations. If you are having problems with a TVM, please submit a TVM Information Form and include your daytime contact information so that our Fare Collection Manager can look into the problems you are having. The form is located on our website at <http://www.vre.org/feedback/tvmconcerns.php>.

david from gainesville va asks:

yesterday evening, our train (#331) was delayed about 20 or so minutes due to a NS efficiency test between Burke Ctr and Manassas Park. I thought going faster would be more efficient. This seems to be an oxymoron.

VRE Management:

Efficiency tests are in the field inspections of our crews. While the name may be an oxymoron, they are ultimately done to ensure the safety of our trains. We could not provide announcements to our riders because our crews also receive those messages. Because the tests must be unannounced, we could not make notifications. I apologize that this was the case and for the inconvenience our Manassas line riders experienced yesterday.

Standing Room Only from Fredericksburg VA asks:

Since the transportation bill failed how about negotiating with Amtrak to alleviate the VRE burden by filling their empty seats and give the train schedules more flexibility. I'm tired of the cattle cars filling up. If the CEO can't negotiate get someone who can. \$10 is way to much. VRE is helping with the stations so why not remind them?

VRE Management:

I have talked with Amtrak about lowering the fee to increase their fare revenue. They have indicated that their ridership is up and that they are even considering eliminating the program if ridership continues to grow on Amtrak trains.

larry from Spotsy asks:

What are the odds of getting an Express Train? What is the status of Spotsy joining the VRE?

VRE Management:

Odds are zero unless Spotsylvania joins. Check with your supervisor and continue to stress the importance of Spotsylvania joining so we can increase the level of service.

John from Burke, VA asks:

Compliments to VRE for generally great service. Are there any plans to equip trains with WiFi?

VRE Management:

We have investigated it numerous times. There are still two large black holes on both lines. One near Clifton and one in Stafford. We will not implement Wi-Fi unless we can have continuous uninterrupted service along both lines.

Debbie from Woodbridge, Va asks:

I'm sure you have been bombarded with questions concerning Smartrip since HUD has made it mandatory, but are you going to continue to pay the \$6.50 shipping charge for Commuter Direct?

VRE Management:

Yes, we will continue to pay the shipping. But tickets will begin to be sent by US Mail instead of express service.

John from Fredericksburg asks:

Since we have had a large influx of new riders in the quiet car that don't seem to be able to read the signs, is it possible to have the conductors remind riders that they are in the quiet car? They could do this when they walk through checking tickets.

VRE Management:

I will see if we can issue more reminders about Quiet Car behavior through Train Talk and on board announcements.

Manassas Rider from Manassas, VA asks:

When is the parking deck in Manassas scheduled to open? Must you have a parking tag from the City in order to park in the deck?

VRE Management:

I expect the Manassas garage to be inspected by the City and open for business by the end of this month. The City will require the parking permit to use the garage.

Susan from Stafford, VA asks:

When is something going to be done about the cold temperature of the new cars? It's disrespectful at this point, because the VRE is well aware that people are very uncomfortable riding the new cars due to the cold air constantly blowing on your body. We should NOT have to carry a full-size blanket on the train just to stay warm.

VRE Management:

Because of the complaints we had about the older cars being too hot, we made sure that the newer cars would be cooler. I have seen a lot of comments on the cooler temperatures in the new cars. I can't seem to win on this one.

Diane from VA asks:

Review of the Daily Download shows that Fredericksburg line delay information much more frequently includes "longer than usual dwell times" as one of the reasons for delays. For July - included in 32% of all F'burg train delays; 16% for all Manassas train delays. If a train inspection holds up a train, why include dwell times? For equipment delays or train holds, why include dwell times? Longer dwell times are a result -- not the cause of most delays. Is there some benefit to VRE of diluting the true -- and often only -- "cause" of delays on these reports/analyses?

VRE Management:

The conductors are required to report all of the causes of delays. As our trains become more crowded, it does take time to board and/or detrain. Dwell time is built into our schedule. In September, we will be checking times on all of our trains to determine if changes to the schedule need to be made.

Terry from Woodbridge, VA asks:

When will the remaining old Gallery cars be taken out of service and fully replaced by the new Gallery cars?

VRE Management:

As of October, we will have all 61 new cars in service. We will have to continue to run at least two train sets of older equipment. Those two train sets will be the pick of the litter! For those who like the warmer cars, train assignments are on the website.

Bob from Woodbridge asks:

Speaking of garages, the graffiti "artists" are at it again in the Woodbridge garage.

VRE Management:

Thanks for letting me know. We will continue to work on Prince William County Police on this.

Karen from Manassas asks:

Why are the stinky tunnels to Union Station smelly only in the afternoon on the way out and not in the morning on the way in?

VRE Management:

Part of the reason is how the trains operate. In the morning, the locomotive is at the rear of the train. In the afternoon, the locomotive is leading the train.

Aaron from Fredericksburg, Va asks:

I would first like to thank you for a easy ride home when traffic is bad on 95 before the holiday weekend. I would however like to voice my displeasure with the VRE office. I called yesterday to ask about a train that was late and

they told me "we dont know why it was late". If the train is going to be late, can we have some notification at the station as to why it it late.

VRE Management:

I assume you are talking train 303. I wasn't happy either and it took too long for Amtrak to tell our staff why the train was late. I am working with Amtrak on this matter so we can speed up the communications from the train to passengers waiting at the platforms.

Marie from Manassas Park, VA asks:

Metro is apparently no longer going to print MetroChecks thereby forcing those of us who receive a transit benefit through our employer to use SmarTrip cards. Using Commuter Connect to purchase tickets results in a shipping/handling charge. When will VRE or it's vendors finally be able to accept SmarTrip cards?

VRE Management:

Once Metro determines the specifications for a regional fare collection system, we will update our equipment to accept SmarTrip cards for VRE ticket purchases. I don't know when that will happen. Until then, as I have indicated, VRE will continue to cover the shipping costs.

Josh from Springfield, VA asks:

Is there a plan to add more carts to the trains now that there are more and more people using VRE?

VRE Management:

I am looking at adding cars, but because of the layout of our daytime storage yard, we are very limited in what we can do. I am hoping to at least bring the two sets that are currently less than 6 cars to that level.

Promteh from Fairfax, VA asks:

I realize the funding is limited. However, we're in August (the vacation month) and the Manassas trains are getting really crowded. There is only standing room in Braddock Road station in the morning. What plans do you have to alleviate the bigger rush come the fall (and probably higher gas prices due to winter)?

VRE Management:

I realize that ridership is up and crowding is occuring. I am concerned about what will happen in September when we normally get a bump in ridership. As I just mentioned, we are very limited in what we can do. I will continue to monitor the situation.

Mike from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Can the policy of no Queing be enforced better? What happened to the train not moving while people stood in the way in the cars and in the vestibule?

VRE Management:

I will continue to work on this with our conductors.

bee from fredericksburg asks:

With all the track maintance that took place last summer, how come the ride in is so rough? There are a couple spots that I am worried that if I fall asleep that I will be knocked out of my seat. Examples: North of Quantico Bridge, near the NS tie-in South of Alexandria ect.

VRE Management:

I'll ask CSX to take a look at this. Since I know they are watching, Nancy and Dave, why don't you give you give us a call.

Don from Warrenton, VA asks:

What is the plan to replace the remaining "old" cars on the Manassas line with new cars?

VRE Management:

As I said, there will still be two train sets of older cars. We revisit the fleet plan with each delivery of cars.

Michael from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Should we expect additional fares increases any time soon? I had heard there might be additional increases coming.

VRE Management:

I'll be honest, the funding situation is extremely difficult. We are preparing the budget for FY 2010 already. It is the most difficult budget I have worked on in the last 13 years. It is not pretty.

Ashok from Lorton,VA asks:

Looks like sometimes the last train to Washington(310), pulls in to Lorton station 2-3 minutes earlier and leaves 1 minute earlier or exact right time(may be as per the conductor's watch but not as per my standard cell phone time). The conductor even though he sees people running towards the train, doesn't care to wait for another 1 or 2 minutes. This happened to me 5-6 times until now. Can't the VRE afford to wait 1-2 minutes at least when it is the last train for the day? For me to take alternate transportation and reach to my work takes more than an hour.

VRE Management:

I only ask two things from our passengers. 1) Have a valid ticket. 2) Get to the station at least 5 minutes prior to departure time. If we delayed at least one minute at every station, the train would be at least 10 minutes late into Union Station. I have made it very clear to our crews that they are to leave on-time. With that said, I will make sure that the train has not been departing early.

VRE Management:

As you know we had a few problems that caused a slow start to the web chat today, but I still managed to answer many of your questions. I look forward to chatting with you again next month. Enjoy the rest of your summer and I'll chat with you after Labor Day!

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