

Virginia Railway Express

Let's Talk!

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



There are currently 79 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Thanks for joining me today!

The big news, as many of you know, transportation funding passed last year by the Virginia General Assembly was found to be unconstitutional.

As I have told you in the past, VRE was to receive \$25M per year under the legislation.

So, what does the recent decision mean to VRE?

1 - We will not add any new service next year.

2 - We planned to purchase six new locomotives next year - we can not do this now.

3 - We were going to increase the insurance trust fund balance. We can't do this either.

It is a real set back.

The General Assembly will take up transportation again, hopefully later this Spring. I will keep you apprised.

Now, on with the questions!

Douglas from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Is there any thought being given to increasing capacity on 307 to Fredericksburg? Currently that train typically has standing room only from Alexandria to at least Woodbridge. While common on Metro, passengers standing on the VRE cars seems inherently more dangerous. Thanks,

VRE Management:

The last part of January, one rail car was removed from this train set for repairs. As a result, overcrowding occurred until the car was recently returned to service. I hope that this has reduced the crowding.

The ridership of all of our trains are monitored and I'll make sure that we keep an eye on it.

Should you continue to have trouble finding a seat, speak to a crew member. Since they move throughout the train, they are in the best position to know where available seats are.

By the way, standing on a VRE train is no less safe than standing on Metro.

Mike from Manassas Park, VA asks:

Parking is getting scarce at Manassas Park. Recently, the lot fills up by 7:30am almost every day. The police are beginning to run us out of the Dental Association parking lot, even though most of that building is empty. I accidentally discovered "Temporary VRE Parking" down the road. Riders parking there must cut through the woods or walk on the shoulder of the busy street and still must, somehow, cross the tracks. I just want to make sure VRE is aware of this situation.

VRE Management:

I am aware of the crowded parking at Manassas Park. I also know about the "new" lot created by the City for those using the station. The City is working on better access to the station from this alternate lot.

Martin from Burke, VA asks:

I commute from Burke to College Park MD and use a monthly TLC card purchased at Casey's which accepts metrocheks for the TLC Card. The TLC card is very important in saving on metro fares for long metro rides. How will the Smartrip Benefits work for obtaining the Monthly TLC card?

VRE Management:

If your employer is transitioning from Metrocheks to "SmartBenefits" you may set up a personal service account with Commuter Direct so that you can use your electronic benefits to purchase your TLC at any Arlington County Commuter Store or receive your VRE ticket at home through the mail. Detailed information about this may be found by visiting CommuterDirect.com's web site at: <https://www.commuterpage.com/smartbenefits.cfm>

Nancy from Manassas, VA asks:

In the Train Talk of 2/27/2008, the Commuter Direct method of getting tickets is mentioned. When signing up, and one normally requests (and gets) the monthly ticket, and in any given month knows they will not be riding the entire month, how far in advance would they have to give notice of change and whether "5-day tickets" or "10 ride tickets" are needed. Thank you

VRE Management:

Check with Commuter Direct on the "deadlines" for changing ticket types for your order. You can reach them by calling 703-228-7433 (RIDE)

Norm from Burke, VA asks:

When the new parking lot at Burke is complete and in use, will all four shuttle buses be discontinued? Thanks,

VRE Management:

I anticipate the garage being finished the either in May or June. The library shuttles will be eliminated since there will be plenty of parking. I don't think that Fairfax County has made any definite plans for the neighborhood shuttles at this time.

Lauren from Burke, VA asks:

There are still people parking illegally at Burke Centre Station and blocking the walking path. I saw a car get ticketed several weeks ago but none recently. Are the police still monitoring this?

VRE Management:

Yes. I'll have someone contact the County about this.

David from Manassas, VA asks:

When is the ticket validation machine on the platform at Manassas Park going to be fixed? It has been non-functional for a very long time.

VRE Management:

Our Fare Collection Manager tells me that we are waiting on replacement parts that have to be shipped from Europe to fix the machine at the north end of the Manassas Park platform. The manufacturer is scheduled to have the parts to us within the week. As soon as the parts are available, we will fix the machine.

Skip from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

How long will the speed restriction continue on the bridge over Potomac Creek. What is wrong with the bridge? When will it be fixed?

VRE Management:

There are several areas along the Fredericksburg that have had "slow orders" placed on them. The good news is that CSX is sending a resurfacing team through our service area this month. This will hopefully eliminate some of these restrictions.

Doug G. from **Bristow** asks:

On train 329, earlier this week, we had a significant safety incident. The train pulled up to the Broad Run Station short of where it normally stops, the doors opened, the conductor got off the train, and began allowing people to detrain. After about a few minutes, and while people were ACTIVELY exiting the train, the engineer began moving the train forward with no warning. At the time the train began to move, some people even had one foot on the train and one foot on the platform. The conductor appeared to be just as surprised as the rest of us when the train started moving.

VRE Management:

Thank you for letting me know. I will definitely look into the matter.

NRM from **Manassas** asks:

What is your on-time performance goal? Would you consider adding a "Month to Date" on-time performance metric at the top of the Daily Download page, rather than waiting until the end of the month to post the final monthly value on the archived Daily Download page?

VRE Management:

Our on-time performance goal is 90% or better. I'll see what can be done to add the Month-to-Date statistic to the Daily Download.

Dave from **Lorton, VA** asks:

Are your newer leased locomotives in service yet? Are you going to rotate them between trains? When VRE buys new locomotives will they be similar to the one you leased from Sounder? Also, you need to update the equipment page. It still shows that you have the leased Sounder locomotive

VRE Management:

Leased locomotives are being inspected for shipment as we speak. Engines are rotated through the trains as service is performed on them.

The new engines being purchased by VRE are manufactured by Motive Power and they are not similar to the Sounder locomotives.

We will update the web site.

Len from **Burke VA** asks:

There is probably a strong chance that ridership will increase when the new parking garage opens at Burke Centre. Will you consider adding another train to the schedule to handle such an increase? If you just add cars to existing trains, there will be significant traffic bottlenecks of hundreds of cars trying to enter or leave the garage at the same time. If there are 2000 cars using the garage, it will be better to have them arrive or leave in 8 smaller batches than 7 larger ones.

VRE Management:

The garage will triple the parking capacity at Burke, so there will be traffic bottlenecks. We experience this at other stations. Unfortunately, this is what happens when a large number of people try and leave the same place at the same time.

Ken from **Lorton, VA** asks:

Briefly explain how the indexing concept will work for adjusting ticket prices.

VRE Management:

When looking at future fare increases, I took a look back at the last five years and compared that to how our fares increased against two indices. Then, I looked forward over the next six years and projected how our costs would increase over that time period.

By looking at both of these, I have determined that our fares need to increase by 3.75% annually. When you look

at our fare increases over the last five years, they increased an average of 3.75%.

Of course, there's more to it than that, but this is the Reader's Digest version.

Deb from Centreville asks:

I heard that when they built the extension to the platform at Manassas Park they could not put in a speaker or TVM because they couldn't run the wiring. Since wiring is now there for a monitor that hardly works, why can't a simple speaker for announcements and TVM be run thru the same conduit? When you're at the far end you cannot hear and you have to run all the way to the other end to validate a ticket?

VRE Management:

Unfortunately, additional wiring for communications is not the only criteria for adding TVMs at the north end of Manassas Park. But, we are looking into adding machines and speakers.

Karen from Manassas asks:

Queuing is still a problem. Yesterday on train 330 Manassas passengers were lining up at Manassas Park. The southend conductor saw it and did nothing.

VRE Management:

Thanks for letting me know. I'll make sure that someone reminds the crew to be on the look out for this.

Debbie from Springfield asks:

Why are the new cars so cold? Cold air blows even when it's cold outside. The floor heaters are never on. Will it be freezing (again!) this summer so we have to wear coats on the VRE?

VRE Management:

The HVAC systems in the new cars are designed to constantly circulate air and maintain a temperature between 68 and 72 degrees F. If you continue to notice a problem in a certain car, note the number (located over the interior doors) and on the outside and let our Director of Rail Equipment & Services know by submitting a Train Information Form (<http://www.vre.org/feedback/mechanicalconcerns.php>) so that he can notify our mechanical staff to look at the problem.

Ray from F'burg asks:

The handicap parking spot in the "A" Lot in Fredericksburg is supposed to be "Van Accessible" but there are typically 2 vehicles parked in a space designed for 1. What can be done... folks driving in a van can't use the slot.

VRE Management:

Thanks for letting me know. I'll have our Facilities Manager let the local police know so that they monitor the lot.

Wilhelmina from Fredericksburg asks:

I'm trying to understand the thought processes that resulted in train 300, your heaviest ridership train, running for a week short one car. You always talk about safety and convenience of your riders but that certainly was lost on those forced to stand in cars not designed for standing. The conductors didn't even enforce the quiet car rules. Don't you have extra cars? In last months forum you indicated that you were keeping several cars for just that purpose. When you get a fare increase will we get better decision-making?

VRE Management:

Unfortunately, we didn't have any extra cars available when it was necessary to remove a car from the train set for maintenance. Certainly, if one had been available, it would have been added. As more new cars come in throughout this year, it should not be a problem in the future.

Louis from Burke, VA asks:

Sir, Will the new parking structure at Burke Center be free of charge?

VRE Management:

Yes, sir.

Diane from Woodbridge, VA asks:

VRE riders oftentimes complain when conditions are uncomfortable or delays are encountered. I do it, too. But at those times I try to remind myself that at least I'm not driving on I-95, which I find intolerable, to say the least. The endless hours endured on the highways to and from work contribute to a substandard quality of life and loss of family time. On the VRE I can read the newspaper, which I haven't been able to do for 15 years. I can drink coffee, think, relax and find otherwise non-existent private time. VRE is doing a fine job and above all I wouldn't trade riding your trains for the world.

VRE Management:

Thanks for the kind words!

Robert from Lorton asks:

What do your train crews do during the day? I see the same crews on my way in and on my way home. I work all day, do they have other jobs to do during the day?

VRE Management:

Since our crews work both mornings and evenings, they spend part of the time between service runs at a facility in the train yard north of Union Station. As you may know, federal safety regulations require that each crew member has a certain number of hours of rest between shifts.

Nicole from Stafford, VA asks:

Train 304- The first car seems to be cold. Is it possible to adjust the thermostat?

VRE Management:

I'll have someone look at it. Thanks for letting me know.

j from Burk asks:

Why can't you just answer the question ask by Len from Burk? "No Len we will not be adding any trains at this time." I really do not understand why you avoid so many question.

VRE Management:

I don't intentionally try to avoid the hard questions. In my opening statement, I mentioned that we would not be able to add any new trains as a result of the ruling on last year's transportation bill. Until we get additional funding, we won't be able to add trains.

Instead of focusing on that, I wanted to address the bottleneck issue.

Jim from Washington, D.C. asks:

Dale - Has VRE been made aware of the potential safety issue that the glass wind partitions have created at L'Enfant and possibly other stations? Passengers huddling under the roofs to avoid rain are "pushed" forward due to the glass partitions. At crowded times, such as evening train arrivals, passengers (crowds)are now standing all the way out onto the yellow safety strips. I'm convinced that it won't be long before someone trips or is inadvertently pushed onto the tracks in front of an arriving train. The arriving trains are moving too fast to stop for such an incident.

VRE Management:

Yes, I am aware of the situation. As you may have noticed, we commented on this in a recent VRE Update. We will continue to monitor the situation.

Kathy from Bristow, VA asks:

Hi. Thanks for recently updating the train consist information. Can you do the same for the ridership numbers per train? I've clearly seen an increase in current ridership since July 2007 (the currently posted numbers). It would be great to see this info get updated regularly.

VRE Management:

I know that we are updating information on our website. I'll make sure that this is added to the list – if it's not already on it.

Dana from Catlett, VA asks:

Is there a plan to provide limited VRE service on non-major holidays such as President's Day? I'm a monthly ticket holder and, though I don't mind if rates go up, I do mind paying for a day when VRE doesn't provide service.

VRE Management:

At this time, there are not plans to add reduced service on "soft" holidays when ridership is extremely low. You may be interested to know that the price of a VRE monthly pass is based on an average of 21 service days. While there are months when we may operate fewer days, there are also months when we operate more. So it more than averages out for riders who regularly use a monthly pass.

Jessica from Manassas, VA asks:

Occasionally I will ride a different train home. My favorite seat is in the new car, first seat on the upper level where there is more leg room. On this particular train (5:00 Union Station), the conductor invariably has his clip board sitting on that seat stating "Conductor Work Area." I don't appreciate the fact that he is taking what I consider to be one of the best seats in the house. Is he really allowed to do that?

VRE Management:

Conductors have paperwork they must complete during service. If a train is not overcrowded, they are allowed to place their belongings in a seat that is easily accessible.

Larry from Fredericksburg asks:

This is a rather distasteful subject, but it needs to be addressed. Could you remind commuters that not using your handkerchief to work on your nose problems can lead to health problems for others. And, that an individual on the upper deck of train 302 can be easily observed by the majority of commuters on the opposite side of the train. Thank you.

VRE Management:

I see there are other courtesy problems, too.

Davin from Woodbridge, VA asks:

How many of the new Gallery coaches will have restrooms? I noticed that car V800 has a restroom, but it's not a cab car.

VRE Management:

My goal is to have at least two restrooms available on each train. To this end, 20 new rail cars were ordered with rest rooms.

Susie from Woodbridge, VA asks:

More of statement to other riders. People using laptops should be careful of information they are typing - I observed another passenger reading over another passengers shoulder yesterday on the train. Also, observed a female passenger putting on her deodorant on the morning train, that is just not necessary to see. Again, men please uncross your legs and keep your legs together so others can sit next to you and not feel cramped. Thanks

VRE Management:

Couldn't say it any better . . . Courtesy tips from a fellow rider!

Deb from Fredericksburg asks:

I ride the 302 and the 305 daily. You say we have the new cars? Why haven't we seen them? I thought all the trains cars were going to be replaced. So when are we suppose to see this happen.

VRE Management:

We have received 15 of our 50 optioned cars and will receive five more each month until October 2008. If your train hasn't received them, it will by November.

david from Gainesville VA asks:

I'm getting BRAC'd to Fort Meade but want to still ride VRE (from Broad Run) to Union Station and then catch MARC. Can my VRE ticket get me on MARC and if not, why and is there a double discount applicable for those poor souls who must travel both railways? Maybe VRE can merge with MARC to make it truly a regional system like other cities!

VRE Management:

VRE and MARC do have a cross-honor agreement where a VRE ticket is good for travel on morning, northbound MARC trains and southbound, afternoon, evening MARC trains. Details may be found on our web site at <http://www.vre.org/service/marc.htm>.

Vanessa from Woodbridge, VA asks:

I am concerned about the exit to the Rippon Station. Traffic comes from 4 directions into the one exit. There is the one stop sign coming from the side parking lot. The other three lanes can be dangerous since most people seem to be racing to get out of the parking lot. There is at least one faded "yeild" painted on the road, but it is seldom followed. Is there any thought to placing yeild and/or stop signs to allow for clearer guidance on who has the right of way. Right now my solution is to wait until almost everyone else has left before attempting to leave.

VRE Management:

I'll have Prince William County look into the situation.

Ed from FredBurg asks:

Are there any schedule changes planned for this year? Also, what fredericksburg line train do you plan on adding the new cars to next?

VRE Management:

While we won't be adding any new trains, we do look at our schedules twice a year and make adjustments as necessary. This typically occurs in April and October.

Tim from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

More of a comment: Please stop bashing the citizens of Spotsylvania County for being the sole moochers of VRE. You can add Fauquier, Culpeper, Orange, King George, Westmoreland, Louisa, Hanover and plenty of others whose residents use the VRE without being part of the paying jurisdictions!

VRE Management:

I don't bash Spotsylvania. There are over 900 riders from Spotsylvania. If you ranked jurisdictions by number of riders, Spotsylvania would be number four. Riders from the other localities you mention have significantly lower ridership.

Mark from Manassas, VA asks:

The current edition of Railway Age magazine has an article about an agreement between Norfolk Southern and the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation to spend \$57 million to improve 50 miles of right-of-way between Manassas and Front Royal. Will any of this work involve improvements needed for the proposed Haymarket Line?

VRE Management:

As I understand it, most of the work you read about will occur from Haymarket westward.

Vicki from **Woodbridge, VA** asks:

When will the GPS tracking system be available on the monitors at the stations?

VRE Management:

I'm still looking at it.

Suzanne from **Broad Run** asks:

No questions this time. Just a comment: Love the new rail cars! Can't wait to see them on all of the trains in service.

VRE Management:

Thanks! It's always nice to end on a positive note.

VRE Management:

Well, our time's up! As always, I appreciate your comments and suggestions. I have made note of several things I need to follow up on.

I look forward to our next forum. It coincides with the beginning of our Meet the Management series, where you can ask your questions in person.

Until then, take care.

Dale

Copyright © 2005 // Virginia Railway Express