

Virginia Railway Express

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, October 1st at 12 noon.



There are currently 38 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Welcome the October Forum. I enjoyed meeting with those who came out to the public forums about proposed fare increases. I finished the last one last evening in Manassas.

We are doing everything we can to minimize costs and keep fare increases minimal in the future. Over the next few months, I will be making recommendations to our Operations Board about any fare increases.

Dawn from Burke Center VA asks:

Will VRE be repairing the gutter at the Burke Center Train Station? The new addition over the platform has a gutter problem that is creating erosion on the platform were the water constantly drips

VRE Management:

Fairfax County's project manager has been notified and will take care of it.

Doug from Burke asks:

Although I support the effort to keep seats available for people instead of stuff, I'm amused by the admission to use the overhead rack for stuff. Where are those overhead racks? For the second level of Gallery cars, two over-aisle racks exist. For lower level riders, no rack is in reach. Where should lower level riders keep their stuff? Do you expect lower level riders to walk to the upper level to put thier stuff in a rack?

VRE Management:

The top rack is for the upper level and the bottom rack is for the lower level. The bottom rack is a little high, but it is at the lowest level we could design. If you cannot reach the racks, you should place your belongings at your feet.

Arif from Springfield, VA asks:

Please add a late train out of Washing, DC. Currently last train is at 6:40 PM leaving Union Station to Fredericksburg. If we have to work late, which is quite often for most of the people who work in DC, we are out of luck after the 6:40 train. It would be better to move the 12:55 PM train to Fredericksburg to say may be 8 PM.

Thank you for your consideration!! Arif

VRE Management:

We did have plans to run a later train than we currently have. In light of the current budget situation, we must push it back until funding for it can be found. As for moving the current mid-day train --based on the public comments we have received so far-- I think we're better off keeping it where it is until we are in a position to add service.

Woody from Manassas asks:

Station dwell times could be decreased for #328 at Crystal City. Every morning, the train stops with the three cars nearest the engine off the platform. These same three cars also are off the platform at Rolling Road & Backlick

Road as well. By placing at least one car off the other end of the platform so that the train has cars extending past BOTH ends of the platform you can reduce station dwell time for this train at three stations by up to 25% for each station. This could be something that you should investigate for all of your consists with heavy passenger loads.

VRE Management:

The reason the southern cars are off the platform is that the northern-most car is designated as the handicapped accessible car. This car must be on the platform for those who need additional assistance detraining.

Melissa from Manassas, VA asks:

I love the new parking garage at the Manassas Station; however, can another reminder be sent out to riders to be cautious of pedestrians walking in the garage? I was almost hit three times yesterday as I was walking to my car and I was walking as close to the wall as possible. Although my attorney and his bank account would love for someone to hit me, I really am not up for being laid out in a hospital. Thanks!

VRE Management:

I am glad you love it! I will make sure additional announcements go out so you can continue to enjoy it.

GaryF from Goldvein, VA asks:

The tracks are becoming very uncomfortable for sleeping on the Fredericksburg line. I am most nervous about the tremendous bang and jostling at some of the ends of bridges (In particular, the north end of the Woodbridge Occoquan Bridge as we go south). Could you ask CSX to take a look at it?

VRE Management:

CSX, Amtrak and VRE personnel rode every Fredericksburg Line train last week and did not note any issues. However, I will ask CSX to continue to keep an eye on it.

Bob from Alexandria, VA asks:

What's the purpose of holding a public hearing relating to fare increases if VRE is going to do what they want anyway? This is pointless, I highly doubt each time a hearing is held, that riders always concur with fare hikes. Once again, what's the purpose?

VRE Management:

Public hearings are opportunities for your voice to be heard. In the past, we held public hearings and changed our position based on the comments we received. For example, based on comments collected from the hearings, the FRC program was not completely eliminated, only altered.

Esther from Fredericksburg asks:

How much money would VRE save if there was no service on the day after Thanksgiving? Those of us who are not federal employees are forced to drive or take leave on Columbus and Veterans' Days -- why not the same for the feds on that day?

VRE Management:

Due to rider demand, we scheduled limited service on the day after Thanksgiving, before the budget for FY2009 became a concern. Cutting service on one day will not be significant savings, but now plans to run limited service on other holidays are put on hold.

Paul from Brooke asks:

With the bare bones service the VRE provideds, cutting the mid-day trains would severely lessen the convenience of commuting on the VRE. Why isn't cutting the VRE office overhead on the table?

VRE Management:

We put out the possibility of cutting mid-day service as a worst case scenario. I am downsizing programs and instituting cost-cutting measures everywhere I can to avoid having to reduce service.

Darlene from Broad Run asks:

To the 2 guys at Broad Run who park their pickups in the COMPACT CAR ONLY row: by no stretch of the imagination is your Ford 4x4 and Toyota extended cab pickups "compact cars;" you create impossibly tight parking spots on either side of your trucks. Since you're there at 5am it's not like there aren't other spots available. (VRE, can we get some police to issue tickets for illegal parkers?) And everyone else: PLEASE slow down in the lots - after surviving a day in the fed gov't, it's not fun to have to dodge for my life avoiding crazy, speed demon drivers exiting the VRE parking lot...

VRE Management:

That kind of says it all.

Jim from Burke, VA asks:

The Manassas a.m. train 326 is packed pulling into Rolling Road and SRO pulling out. Can you add another car to the consist?

VRE Management:

I have noticed that ridership is up on 326. Unfortunately, I am not in a position to add any more cars to its consist due to mid-day storage constraints, as well as budgetary ones. If ridership on 326 continues on this trend and consistently has more than ridership than 328, we may have to switch the consists. These constraints go for the rest of the system as well.

Joe from Broad Run asks:

Your response to SLS of Fredricksburg last month (re increased ridership should help to offset increases in fuel prices) is confusing. You stated "Increased ridership does not offset shortfalls in the budget, it only strains it more because more people means we should provide more service, which costs more money." I've not noticed an increase in service, and VRE should be seeing an increase in income, not a decrease. Has VRE really had more expenses (greater than fees collected) due to the increased ridership?

VRE Management:

Let me clarify. As ridership increases, we do gain fare revenue. However, that revenue does not come close to covering the increased expenses due to fuel, Amtrak labor settlement and other issues. I'm sorry if I didn't make that more clear.

DERRICK from FREDERICKSBURG, VA asks:

Will VRE be extending the train service pass fredericksburg anytime soon.

VRE Management:

No. However, Spotsylvania is once again considering joining VRE. if you are a Spotsylvania resident, PLEASE let your supervisor know your feelings on this. It it very important.

Wayne Carter from Fredericksburg asks:

Who was that stunning tall African American woman collecting surveys on 306 this morning?!

VRE Management:

Will pass your complement on to Mrs. Thompson -- our Senior Administrative Coordinator.

Jim from Manassas, VA asks:

Last week, a contingent of 6-8 armed TSA Officers were waiting at L'Enfant Plaza in the AM observing passengers leaving the train. Is TSA partnering with VRE for security?

VRE Management:

We partnered with TSA's VIPR team to provide a presence at several of our stations last Thursday. We are continuing to develop our relationship, so you can expect to see them at other stations.

Eileen from Fredericksburg, Virginia asks:

Is there any chance that Spotsylvania will be getting their own VRE station in the near future? I live about one mile from the Leeland Station and even the overflow parking lot is half full for the 7:21 train. Our Spotsy riders are taking many of the spaces. They should at least be charged to park in the parking lot, especially if their City Council do not want a VRE Station. However, now with the lack of county stickers, I guess it would be impossible to enforce.

VRE Management:

Spotsylvania supervisors are again talking about the possibility of joining VRE. I'll keep you updated if it comes up for a vote and encourage our Spotsylvania riders to make their opinion known to their supervisors about VRE.

Randy from Bristow, VA asks:

Train 327 bound for Broad Run, over the past year this train has only arrived at the station at 5 pm, 12 times in the past year- at best. The train speed between Burke and Manassas Park has decreased considerably and is the cause for the "constant" late arrival at destination. Again this is not a "once in a while issue", this train is late 5:06 - 5:09pm each and everyday. Please explain why this train can't make its schedule? This constant late arrival accumulates in time and leaves many annoyed, and has nothing to do with the recent increase in ridership. Thank you,

VRE Management:

We know that we are missing some of the intermediate points on some of our trains. We are in the process of performing schedule checks to determine what changes are necessary. We plan on putting out a new schedule sometime in January.

david from gainesville asks:

is VRE actively lobbying local, state and federal officials for money; seems we're always a dollar short...

VRE Management:

We actively discuss our financial situation with local, state and federal officials all the time. However, the current financial condition for the state and localities is as dire as I have ever seen since I have been with VRE. The ability for state and local jurisdictions to help us has been significantly reduced.

RP from Fredericksburg asks:

In light of the allegations concerning the horrific accident in LA, what are VRE's policies regarding your train crews usage of cell phones... texting or otherwise?

VRE Management:

Amtrak, from whom we contract our crews, CSX and Norfolk Southern have policies in place that no electronic devices (cell phones, pagers, iPods, etc.) are to be used in the cab or locomotive while the train is in motion. With that said, there are usually multiple factors of an accident of this magnitude. It will take at least one year for the final NTSB report to be issued. Other recommendations may come out of that report.

Joe from Fredericksburg asks:

First of all let me say that I don't envy your job. You are in a tough place trying to do more with less. I for one appreciate your effort and perseverance. My question is, with most of the trains being over crowded and often standing room only, why does the VRE continue to spend much needed funds on radio and other advertisements trying to get new riders?

VRE Management:

Thank you, I appreciate the kind words. With the number of military and others who are frequently transferring in and out of the Northern Virginia area, we have a turnover rate of 20-30%. In order to continue to advertise to get our name out there, just as McDonalds and Coca-Cola continue to do, even though they are household names. Besides, the higher the ridership, the more evidence I have to support increased funding for VRE.

Thomas the Tank Engine from Spotsy, VA asks:

With current budget woes and ridership at record highs, why are you taking out full page ads in the Free-Lance Star seeking new ridership? Despite the woeful lack of investment in rail infrastructure by the government, I think you are doing a good job providing the level of service that you do. Peep! Peep!

VRE Management:

Thanks for your support! Woo-Woo. Dale the Diesel

Bugged from Fredericksburg asks:

Can you do something about the flying insects on the Cab Car on #300? They have not been as bad the last few days with the cooler weather, but they can really be a nuisance when they're swarming.

VRE Management:

I'll ask our mechanical team to take another look at it.

John from Haymarket, VA asks:

In last month's Online Forum the following question was asked: What would be the issues preventing Manassas Line train 330 from being an express train (bypassing Backlick and Rolling Road). According to the schedule it should be able to arrive into ALX 10 minutes earlier. You said that "it would have to slow down everyday for Fredericksburg Line train 306 scheduled in front of it" That does not make any sense because the 306 arrives at ALX at 7:41 and if the Manassas 330 is ten minutes earlier it would arrive at 7:58. Plus an amtrak train arrives at 7:47.

VRE Management:

The railroad signal system starts to slow trains following other trains significantly early. Imagine a stoplight signaling you to slow down when there is a car not at the light ahead of you, but two, or maybe even three lights ahead of you. This safety buffer is a mechanism to help prevent train collisions. Because of the tight schedule at Alexandria you mention, plus another southbound Amtrak scheduled at 7:47, if VRE 330 was an express train, it would most likely have to wait to come into Alexandria.

Kevin from fredericksburg, va asks:

When are you going to pave the other parking area at Leeland road.

VRE Management:

I don't think so. That lot is leased from a developer by Stafford County.

Ron from VA asks:

Given the current economic situation in the various counties will VRE funding be reduced? If so, will it force to reduce the service currently being provided?

VRE Management:

Hopefully , not. I'll know when I submit the budget for next year in December.

Dave from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Will Metro's SmartTrip upgrade delay cause VRE to delay upgrading it's TVM?

VRE Management:

Yes. :(

Christopher from Gainesville, VA asks:

What is being done if anything to improve the parking situation at Broad Run as there are not enough parking spaces.

VRE Management:

I have approached Prince William County about building a parking garage at Broad Run. They seem interested but nothing definite yet.

Paul from Burke, VA asks:

I read an article: Va. to Get \$32M in Federal Transportation Funds It states that VRE will receive some of that money, what is it being used for?

VRE Management:

VRE will receive \$3.9 million of these funds. This will permit us to buy three additional new locomotives -- for a total of five.

insides_still_rattling from fredericksburg asks:

My insides are still rattling from this morning's torturous ride on train 300. I thought the World Court condemned the use of the cattle cars as instruments of torture. When will the last of the new cars be operating?

VRE Management:

Train 300 experienced mechanical problems this morning. Rather than significantly delaying the train, we opted to torture our passengers with a train set that offered two less cars and was an older set. We thought our riders would prefer this form of torture over being significantly late.

Michael from Fredericksburg VA asks:

I ride the Fredricksburg line to Washington DC everyday. In the morning hours, the train cars are new, on the return trip I take I believe the 301 (3:40), and only one car is new. I watch the Manassas train roll by and all the cars are new? When are the newer cars going to be assigned full time to the Fredericksburg line? Thanks

VRE Management:

All of the new cars are in service. Each line has one train set equipped with the older cars.

Laura from Fred'burg, VA asks:

The HR office at my job just notified us that we will no longer get Metrocheks as of December 1st. We will be getting something called a voucher. Do you know anything about this and will the vendors know to except these vouchers. From my knowledge Metro is doing away with Metrochek. Please let me know ASAP. We all might have to find a new way in to work.

VRE Management:

Metro is doing away with Metrocheks and replacing them with SmartBenefits Vouchers. They are the same as Metrocheks, which you can use to purchase VRE tickets. The only difference is you cannot use them for fare on Metro. This is to help them reduce fraud seen in their system.

Steve from Fredericksburg asks:

How much does VRE pay CSX and Norfolk-Southern to access their rail systems?

VRE Management:

Approximately \$17.00 per train mile.

Tony from Burke, VA asks:

Can some bike racks be installed at the Rolling Road station? Right now we have to lock our bikes to lightpoles or whatever else we can find. Bike racks would be a nice addition.

VRE Management:

We have requested that Fairfax County install them at this station. They are working on it. I'll see if I can speed them up.

Casey from VA asks:

It was great this morning (01OCT08) to get on the 6:55 out of Lorton, VA and find a place to sit. I noticed you had

extra railroad cars. Please tell me that's going to continue. Thank you.

VRE Management:

The eight car train you boarded this morning is usually reserved for Train 300, which has higher ridership than Train 304. That eight car set experienced mechanical difficulties this morning so it was swapped with another later trainset so 300 would not take a significant delay. Sorry to say that the longer train set will still be reserved for 300.

James from **Falmouth** asks:

I can stomach another fare increase, but don't eliminate the Fred. mid-day train... what is the disposition of this option at this point?

VRE Management:

I presented that option as a worst case scenario. The probability of cutting the mid-day trains is very low.

Christopher from **Gainesville, VA** asks:

What happens to the questions that don't get answered when time runs out?

VRE Management:

I would love to answer all the questions, unfortunately some get left unanswered.

Jameson from **Fredericksburg VA** asks:

Hi, Will weekend service or midday service be put into place anytime soon? Also what are your planned service cuts? Thanks

VRE Management:

Mid-day service is already offered. I do not anticipate adding more service until more funding can be secured.

Marissa from **Nokesville** asks:

Any chance on getting another car on Train 329? Its now standing room only beyond Crystal City. Help!

VRE Management:

I have notice the jump in ridership as well. At this time, I do not anticipate adding another car to #329. But, we will continue to keep an eye on the situation.

Lauren from **Burke, VA** asks:

Has there been any discussion of making the parking garage exit into a 3-way stop? The current situation creates a huge back-up for people leaving the garage, especially with the early evening trains.

VRE Management:

I'll ask Fairfax County to look into the possibility.

Bob from **Burke, VA** asks:

Since VRE is "short" on money, why does VRE offer reduced fares for seniors? The majority of seniors on the train work the same jobs and get paid just like the rest of us "younger" folks. Why does VRE give-up approximately \$100 per monthly ticket per senior, and essentially have non-seniors subsidize them? Even if it's only 10 seniors a month, that's \$1,000, and I'm sure it's a lot more than 10 seniors....

VRE Management:

The FTA requires us to provide reduced fares to seniors and those with disabilities on off-peak trains. However since we have limited off-peak service, our Board decided to offer reduced fares for all of our service.

Leeann from **Faifax, VA** asks:

How are the train schedules determined? For example, the Union Station departure times for the Manassas Line seem odd, given that most people work to the hour or half-hour. Why is there a 5 p.m. train, rather than 5:15, or a 5:45, rather than 5:30? People need time to get from their place of work to the train station. Are departure times re-evaluated, and if yes, what type of analysis is done? Thank you.

VRE Management:

Our departure times out of Union Station are dependent on many things, including scheduled Amtrak trains out of the station. While departure times may not work for everyone leaving Union Station, we do have three other departure stations that we have to keep in mind.

Mary from Stafford, VA asks:

Can we please keep the new cars on trains 304 & 309? With the exception of this morning- the older cars have been used in the place of the new ones.

VRE Management:

Until we get the 10 Gallery cars to replace the Kawasaki cars we sold, estimated arrival is Spring 2010, we will shuffle around the older Gallery sets to different trains. We currently have two sets of the older Gallery cars, one on the Manassas Line and one for the Fredericksburg Line.

TA from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Dale - Train 300 was sure crowded this morning, lacking two cars! Standing room only. Being dark out in the morning it is hard to see your station. So, announcements by the conductors are vital. There were none this morning. So many of us standing found it hard to "see" where we were. At least a verbal by the conductors would have been nice.

VRE Management:

I will stress the importance of on-board announcements to our crews, especially during an irregular operation.

Bill from Manassas asks:

Just a courtesy thing here and that is for the folks who insist on lighting up their smokes as soon as they get off the train. Can you please wait just a few minutes more before lighting up. The people around you and walking behind you would appreciate it. Thanks...

VRE Management:

Smokers, please do not light up until after exiting the platform. Or reserve smoking for the designated area which is the northern end of the platform.

Betty from Manassas asks:

I enjoy reading the question and reading your answers. The humor you add makes this priceless and informative all at the same time. thank you.

VRE Management:

Thanks! Glad that I can keep you informed and entertained.

Dennis from Manassas, VA asks:

If the Gainesville extension becomes a reality, will it be an addition to existing service or a replacement of the Broadrun station? If an addition, will there be more trains coming through Manassas or will they alternate schedules with Broadrun?

VRE Management:

If we provide additional service to Gainesville/Haymarket, service to Broad Run will continue. Part of the ongoing feasibility study is to determine what we need to do to make it all work.

Davin from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Is it policy to delay an on time train for a late train to go ahead of it?

VRE Management:

Yes, if you are on it (just kidding, Davin). Seriously, this is an issue we continue to struggle with. I'll continue to work with Amtrak and CSX on these situations.

VRE Management:

Well, our time is up! Thanks for all the good questions.

I also want to thank you for all of your feedback on the proposed fare increases. We have received lots of emails and letters and I enjoyed meeting those of you who attended the public hearings.

I'll be making a recommendations to our Board in the October session. Once I know the outcome, I'll make sure to keep you updated.

Our next forum is Wednesday, November 5. Be sure to get out and vote. We will work to make sure the trains are on time.

Dale

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