

Virginia Railway Express

Let's Talk!

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



There are currently 59 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Thanks for joining me! I trust that everyone had a good three-day weekend. There are a lot of good questions toadya and I look forward to answering as many as I can. Let's get started!

Marc from F-burg asks:

What is the timetable for lengthening the platform at Crystal City - a source of consistent delays for morning trains of both lines?

VRE Management:

Funding is the main issue. Rather than lengthen platforms, we are going to take a look at our schedules. Later this month, teams made up of VRE, Amtrak, and CSX personnel are going to ride all trains to see if any problems like these are happening and adjust the schedule accordingly.

Bart from Fredericksburg asks:

How will the sale of the cars affect you plans to have extra cars ready when others go down for maintenance? Are the leased engines in service yet? It has been a long time.

VRE Management:

As we are still receiving the new Gallery cars, all of the old Gallery coaches have not been sold. Those will be used as backup when the others need maintenance. As for the leased engines, one is in service but we are still working out the kinks on the other two.

John from Stafford, VA asks:

Two Questions: Are there any plans to establish express service from Stafford/F'burg area to Alexandria-Union Station? Are there any plans studies regarding instituting weekend service? Thanks, John

VRE Management:

While there are plans in the works, it is not likely to happen in the near future. An express train would be additional service, which we cannot fit into the budget this year or next.

John from Haymarket, VA asks:

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.

VRE Management:

Our schedule right now is set to provide enough space between each train to allow each train operate at maximum speed. If we were to express 330 past Backlick and Rolling, it would have to slow down everyday for Fredericksburg Line train 306 scheduled in front of it.

SLS from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

In the VRE Strategic Plan, page, 26 -- 3. VRE in the Future, item 2 states that order to "control ridership" one strategy is to: "2. Raise the fare substantially in an effort to curb the growth in demand and generate sufficient income to preserve a premium quality of service, in effect rationing the service to those willing to pay a premium for it ..." When I first read this, I was incensed that a strategy like that was even written down. The cost of the VRE is prohibitive to so many people that this strategy feels like discrimination against the poor and middle class. I would like to know if this is a strategy that the VRE considering but using the excuse of the cost of fuel (I know it is high – it hurts me too) to raise rates. It seems a bit slimy. You would think with an increase in ridership the additional monies would be generated to help off-set the cost of fuel. The cost of fuel is now going down, will VREs prices go down as well? I know that the increase is just not to off set fuel costs, but to buy new equipment, it is just plain unfair to think your rides can support all your initiatives. Perhaps you should charge Spotsy riders an additional fee to ride the VRE since the rest of us are paying the price for them.

VRE Management:

Fares only cover 50-60% of the operating budget. 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. The proposed fare increase is to cover fuel costs, a recently settled Amtrak labor dispute, and locomotive maintenance.

Jennifer from Burke asks:

I know the Burke garage is a Fairfax County project but do you have any information re: completion time of the remaining work? Thanks!

VRE Management:

I anticipate it will complete by the end of September.

Mike from Burke asks:

What determined distribution of free rides from Burke on August 20th?

VRE Management:

Zip codes and demographics. With the opening of the new parking garage, we wanted to let residents in the surrounding area know there is an alternate commute available.

Michael from Hume, VA asks:

I saw VRE cars in Strasburg over the weekend. Why are they there? Has anyone even dreamed of regular service to Strasburg or even Front Royal?

VRE Management:

We store some of our backup equipment in Norfolk Southern's yard in Strasburg because the capacity in our yards is near saturation. Also some of the equipment we sold is there waiting for the buyer to pick it up. I am sure someone has dreamed of service in that area, but is a long way from reality.

michelle from fredericksburg va asks:

i work at quantico, and as i understand it, the coffee shop there is going to switch hands. i was told this was to happen last month, but that has not happened yet. when will it happen?

VRE Management:

The current tenant's last day is the 10th of this month. I am pushing to have the new vendor in there as soon as they can sell tickets. I do not have an exact date when that will happen, but we will keep you posted.

ray from richmond, va asks:

what is the capacity of the signaled siding (a.k.a #4 Track), that is located between the l'enfant vre station and virgina interlocking? thanks!

VRE Management:

The siding adjacent to L'Enfant is intended for storage and we can fit two six car sets on those tracks. We are waiting on some items to be installed before it is put into use.

Idalia from Burke, VA asks:

How much longer is the North/South Burke shuttle be in effect? Is the discount still available by punching the cards?

VRE Management:

Fairfax Connector will make a decision this fall based on current ridership now that the garage is open. Because of the opening of the garage, the discount has been discontinued.

Lyle from Fred asks:

Since it was determined to be a good business decision to sell the comfortable Kawasaki cars, when can we expect to be riding on the new replacements...years from now???

VRE Management:

Ten replacements will be here by March 2010. Until then, we have more than enough cars to for our current schedule.

Charlie from Manassas asks:

Instead of raising rates multiple times over the course of a year, why not raise them once with a big increase and get it over with?

VRE Management:

I'll study the idea. It has merit!

Dave from Lorton, VA asks:

Now that you have a car wash at the crossroads railyard, will VRE be able to wash it's new cars more often? This will allow the cars to continue looking like new

VRE Management:

We are intending to cycle all of the train sets on a regular basis to the Fredericksburg Line to utilize our new carwash facility at our Crossroads yard. That way, all of our cars, old and new, will have that clean look.

Kerri from Manassas Park, Va asks:

I just wanted to praise everyone at VRE for such good service. I've ridden VRE for the last almost 2 years and its sooo much better than driving. My ride to work and home is so relaxing. The cars are mostly quiet and enjoyable, unlike metro! Keep up the good work. I saw that you intend to raise fares in January and July, but I haven't seen how much exactly you want to increase them. How much in fare increase are we talking here?

VRE Management:

Thank you!

We will start public hearings this month on potential fare increases. The amount of the increase will be heavily determined by: the future price of fuel, our anticipated maintenance expenses and the final bill on the Amtrak labor settlement. Hopefully, we will have clarity on these issues by late October.

Vienna Jordan from Washington, D.C. asks:

What kind of "EFFECTIVE" plan are you preparing so that your trains operate on time? Mechanical problems are too frequent and offering Metro may be cost effective but not service effective. I still get to work late - and I don't like it.

VRE Management:

The plan in place appears to be working well. On-time performance for the month of August was the highest it has been since December 2006. With CSX dispatchers now in the area and significant track work completed, I expect this trend to continue.

AI from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Is construction going to start soon at the Woodbridge station?

VRE Management:

I expect the construction for the second platform to start anywhere from the middle to the end of this month.

Ed from Fredericksburg asks:

Just want to comment on the OTP. It was disappointing to see OTP decline month after month. However, August was great, it was so refreshing to get to work and get home on time day after day. Keep up the good work!!

VRE Management:

Great! Glad you noticed!

Scott from Stafford asks:

Wanted to thank you for the re-striping of the Brooke lot and for the addition of the motorcycles spaces.

VRE Management:

You're welcome. If the motorcycle spaces are regularly utilized, I hope to have them at more stations.

Scott from Bristow, Va asks:

First, thank you for a very nice riding experience. Secondly, my question concerns bringing full sized bicycles onto the VRE trains. I currently ride the VRE from Broad Run to L'enfant. I have to ride one bike from my house to Broad Run, ride the VRE, and ride another bike from L'enfant to my work. DC is not the best place to lock a bike overnight and weekends as it has been vandalized numerous times. Will you allow full sized bikes on the VRE in the future? It would be greatly appreciated by many, I do believe. Thank you.

VRE Management:

The bike policy is something I am hoping to revisit after all we complete the order of new Gallery cars this month. It is on my agenda and hope to have a new policy in place by the end of the year.

Victoria from Vint Hill asks:

What's with these "efficiency tests?" Trees across tracks, broken engines, even "heat restrictions" are more tolerable than being 15 minutes late "to test efficiency." Be aware that procedures like these are the epitome of why the public scorns mass transit.

VRE Management:

Efficiency tests are more like safety tests. These government mandated checks must be performed in the field. Unfortunately, they must occur for our crews when riders are on board.

Deb from Crystal City asks:

Can you have someone fix the rain gutters and the north end of the station? When it DOES rain, there is a steady downpour like someone turned on a water hose! And, inverably, the train stops with the doors right in front of it!

VRE Management:

I'll have someone fix them.

John Re: SLS from F-Burg, VA asks:

RE: SLS... Dale, I think the question everyone wants answered in simple terms is this: If the VRE's ridership has significantly increased (which it has), shouldn't that in turn mean that VRE is making more money and fares should increase. I know that "fares only cover 50-60%", so what were fares covering before the massive increase in ridership. Thanks in advance for the answer. God bless.

VRE Management:

It's an issue of magnitude. The total increase in operating costs far exceeds the fare revenue generated by new ridership.

For example, diesel fuel has gone up 78% in the last year -- roughly a \$3 million increase for our budget. It would take 1,000 new riders to cover that expense.

Currently, we have had an increase of 300 riders -- well short of the number we need to cover just the increased fuel costs. Other expenses would require an even greater increase in passengers.

Marcus from Burke VA asks:

Why has VRE suggested we keep our ticket receipts in case we can't locate our ticket. I watched a man cited the other day who had misplaced his monthly pass but had a receipt for the monthly? The conductor's response was "That's nice but it's not a ticket."

VRE Management:

When a ticket is lost, riders are still responsible for having a valid ticket to board the train. However, having your receipt makes it easier to process a replacement Monthly pass.

James from Washington, DC asks:

Short of staging a coup in Richmond, what can we do to get more money for VRE? Another round of fare increases with people standing for the length of their commute spells trouble for VRE.

VRE Management:

I know fare increases are not going to be popular in these tough economic times. VRE is doing its part by trimming the budget as much as possible as enacting fuel saving measures. I always encourage riders to contact their elected officials to stress the importance of transportation. Also please come to our public hearings and voice your concern. If you can't make it, send a message to publiccomment@vre.org. We will summarize all comments to the elected officials on our Operations Board.

Dan from Stafford, VA asks:

How many old Gallery cars are on each line? It appears that the Manassas line received all the new cars (except one train) and the Fredericksburg line now has most of the older Gallery cars with the elimination of the Kawasaki cars. Your change to the consist listing was creative not to show the distinction.

VRE Management:

Because we are going to cycle the old Gallery cars to different trains on a regular basis to use the carwash in our Crossroads yard, we decided to have the consist page show a uniform Gallery fleet. Our fleet will be eventually be all new Gallery coaches. When we complete our current order of Gallery cars, we will have one train set on each line consist of old Gallery cars.

Jennifer from Nokesville asks:

Is there ANY hope of there ever being additional parking at Broad Run (even 10 years in the future). Or is it just a foregone conclusion that the maximum number of parking spots has been reached?

VRE Management:

The only hope there is to construct a parking garage at Broad Run. I am pursuing the possibility now.

Frank from Arlington, VA asks:

This is not a question but an appeal from a regular rider to my fellow VRE riders. This morning several

passengers and I on Fredericksburg Line Train 308 at Brooke witnessed what but for the grace of God could have been a tragic accident. A passenger detrained at the last minute, attempted to validate and then reboard the now moving train. He didn't make it, losing his grip and footing he fell from the train dragging the conductor with him. Both men ended up on their backs on the platform immediately next to the moving train. Please fellow riders, DON'T TAKE THIS KIND OF RISK!!!!

VRE Management:

Frank, I could not have said it better myself! It is far better to miss a train than to lose life or limb.

Bob from Lorton, VA asks:

today the 302 became disabled in Alex. A Manassas line train entered the station on the other track. Instead of holding that train and allowing us to board it was allowed to proceed. The Metro option was made available but it would seem that VRE could have saved some money and our time by holding that train.

VRE Management:

These are very fluid situations. Since we did not know how long it would take for 302 to move, the initial plan was to have the Manassas line train push 302 north. As a result, we opened the Metro Option which allowed riders a faster way to reach their destinations.

Mike from Rippon, VA asks:

VRE used to change its schedule every spring and fall. How come VRE doesn't do it anymore?

VRE Management:

Normally, we adjust our schedules in accordance with Amtrak changes. Since Amtrak has not altered their schedules, we have not needed to in the recent past. However, we are taking a look at our schedules this fall for possible changes in January.

joe from Fredericksburg asks:

Conductors are leaving Passengers behind, as the train is getting ready to pull out. If the Conductors see passengers on the platform or anywhere in sight they should at least wait a few more seconds so they board on the train. It's getting more difficult to find parking in the Fredericksburg line; therefore passengers are rushing just to miss the train while the conductors look on. I understand that they have a schedule to keep, but what is a few seconds to ensure that no passengers is left behind, After all, we wait patiently when VRE is late sometimes 30 to 60 min, then why can't VRE wait few more seconds for us

VRE Management:

The trains do have a schedule to keep. If the trains stayed even a minute more at each station than scheduled to, it would delay each train twenty minutes. We try to keep the trains on-time as much as we can. I keep encouraging riders to show up to the platform at least five minutes before schedule departure. I understand that is not always possible, but other riders who do show up early, do not want to end up being twenty minutes late waiting for late passengers.

Fred from Annandale, VA asks:

to counter the complaints of other riders => I like it that the new cars have functional air conditioning and are kept cool. after walking from the office in summer and getting slightly sweaty, it's nice that the cars will actually cool me off. don't touch that thermostat!

VRE Management:

Support from a rider who likes it on the cold side.

Jennifer Flores from Woodbridge asks:

I don't understand why VRE standardized its fleet with these cars. Weren't the ones sold to the MTA much nicer and didn't they carry more people? Am I missing something here?

VRE Management:

A standardized fleet is easier and less expensive to maintain. When we had multiple style of cars, we had to have

multiple kinds of parts on hand, multiple processes of maintenance, etc. The Kawasaki cars we just sold hold the same number of people as our new Gallery coaches. The upside is that we have more cars with restrooms.

Betty from Manassas asks:

Alli can say, is "Thank Goodness" for the VRE! In spite of all the little things people complain about (I think I read about "loud" newspaper reading), just thank your lucky stars we have it! Also, please continue to keep our train service premium- clean and safe- don't let it degrade into the condition we see on the metro. Good Job- We support you for making our trips comfortable!!!

VRE Management:

Thank you very much!

Kirke from Manassas, VA asks:

Is the Manassas parking garage open and in full operation now? If so, please get the word out. Perhaps it will help address the extreme situation at Broad Run. It must be at 130% capacity or more with all the people forced to park on the side of the road. Thanks you.

VRE Management:

The Manassas garage is open. We sent out a Train Talk email on Friday, sorry you may have missed it.

Jerry from Fairfax asks:

Please explain how the On Time Performance accounts for cancelled trains? Being late is better than not showing at all!

VRE Management:

Any train that is more than six minutes late in reaching its final destination (or cancelled) is considered a "miss." Cancelling a train is not my first option, but statistically it counts the same as a train that is late by six minutes.

Chris from Burke, VA asks:

Has there been any progress in getting Fairfax county to put a crosswalk across Burke Rd at the Rolling Rd station? Once the days start getting shorter crossing that road in the dark becomes quite dangerous.

VRE Management:

I have approached Fairfax County on this issue. I'll attempt to get a answer soon.

VRE Management:

Our time is up! We will start public hearings this month on the potential fare increases. It is important for me and our operations board to hear your concerns. Please attend a meeting or send us your comments. Information is available on our web site.

VRE Management:

The financial picture for VRE is the most difficult one the I have faced in the last 13 years.

Of course, the primary cause is the increase in diesel fuel and maintenance costs. What exacerbates the situation the most is that the local jurisdictions that own VRE are also in difficult financial situations because of declining property values and associated tax revenues.

On top of that, the state has a \$1 billion shortfall and is talking about cutting funding for transportation. Thus, we can not turn to our normal funding partners for help.

VRE Management:

With that said, I look forward to seeing you at a public hearing.

Our next chat is scheduled for October 1st. Have a great month and I'll see you then!
