

Virginia Railway Express

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Tuesday, June 9th at 12:00pm.



There are currently 93 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Thank you for joining me.

Before we begin, I hope you all got a copy of our Train Talk explaining the issues we experienced last night. I am still working on rectifying some of the issues. But, rest assured, I am committed to returning our on-time performance to better levels.

Now, on to the questions.

Larry from Clifton, VA asks:

When will the policy on ticket validation be changed? How do you plan to update the policy for people who simply forget to validate their ticket? Right now, if a person does not have a validated ticket, then they're issued a summons. The cost is \$221. Please do not explain or rationalize the current policy. It just needs to change. Any comments before we ask the general public what they think would be fair? Thanks.

VRE Management:

I am sorry you do not agree with our ticket validation policy. Currently we do not have any plans for changing it. I have said time and again that there are only two things you need to do to ride the trains 1) Have a valid ticket and 2) Be ready to board before your train is scheduled to arrive.

Kevin from Fredericksburg asks:

Could you please remind other riders that personal grooming (clipping fingernails, perfume, makeup) should be done BEFORE boarding the train? It really grosses me out when someone clips their fingernails on the train!

There are some repeat offenders!

VRE Management:

We put out all types of courtesy reminders via conductor announcements, platform announcements, weekly Train Talks, on-board newsletters, and are regular discussions here on the on-line forum. This particular issue will also be depicted on a new station poster that will be out soon.

PMA from Spotsy, VA asks:

At each station that I've stopped at, I've noticed that there is no clock at any one of them. I know this is true at Fredericksburg and Crystal City and I'm pretty sure it's the case at Rippon, Woodbridge, and Alexandria. I'm not even referring to the more elaborate clock towers one typically expects to see at a train station, just something to let us know how late we are, or how much time there is before the train pulls up. Whether it's a simple clock or the time displayed on the info screen, is this something that can be done? I'm sure it would be a big help for many.

VRE Management:

While it is a good suggestion and one that has been brought up many times since the information screens were installed. We feel since we cannot provide accurate USNO time (the time our trains operate on) on those screens, it would be a disservice to provide inaccurate information to our riders.

John from Fredericksburg asks:

Strange question but how do you allocate restrooms to train consists? I've noticed that some trains have more than others, train 307 which is the longest train you operate only has 2, while it seems the shorter consists have 4 or 5. Surely the longer trains should have more restrooms as they carry more passengers.

VRE Management:

Restrooms also take away from available seats and since Train 307 carries the most people and is often quite crowded, we made the conscious decision to provide more seats than toilets on 307, which also operates 300.

Les from Manassas Park, VA asks:

Why don't the train stations have receptacles for people to place their cigarette butts so they don't throw them on the ground?

VRE Management:

Since smoking at most of our stations is limited to the northern most end of the platforms, the receptacles for cigarette butts are placed there.

Chris from Richmond, VA asks:

I've been noticing loud speaker comments and Train Talk posts about personal hygiene and now talking on cell phones. I can understand not doing your nails because of the smell, but don't you think it's getting a little extreme? As a norm, I don't get ready on the train or talk excessively on my cell. However, some of us commute 2+ hours each way a day and need to utilize this commute time to for things that can't be done at work. Will you soon be telling all the cars that they need to be quiet or that they can't snack on something to/from work?

VRE Management:

I know that the train is where you start your day; however, all we want is for riders to use a little courtesy when deciding which grooming activities to do. Putting on perfume, using hairspray, shaving, clipping fingernails are probably not best to do on the train while putting on chap stick or lipstick is perfectly fine. The items mentioned is not an end all list either, please just be aware of any action that may adversely affect those around you.

MaryAnne from Manassas, VA asks:

After riding VRE for almost three years, next week will be my last week. Thank you for the overall great commute that I have enjoyed. I'm changing jobs that will take me from working downtown to elsewhere in the suburbs, where VRE is not a real option. Despite the frustration that can come with the delays that occur on occasion, I keep reminding myself that even if I were stuck in traffic due to an accident, I would still get home faster on the train. Traffic around DC is pervasive, and even exiting off the Beltway or I-66 will not get you there any faster. Thank you!

VRE Management:

Thank you. I wish you much success in your new position.

Esther from Fredericksburg asks:

Who from the VRE staff will be attending the Spotsy forum at Riverbend H.S. on Thursday night?

VRE Management:

I will be there, along with Mark Roeber, VRE Manager of Public Affairs and Government Relations, and our General Counsel, Steve MacIsaac.

Petersen from King George, VA asks:

Do you understand the magnitude of a two-hour delay for a parent with children in daycare? Yes, there will be late trains (quite a few recently may I add). But a two-hour delay without contingencies in place that work is unacceptable. We already pay a hefty fee (that rises continually). It's time to show some respect to your paying riders and their schedules.

VRE Management:

I know that these delays can be especially hard on working parents. It may interest you to know that VRE has a "Security Blanket" program that can reimburse you for daycare late fees. Information on the program can be found on our web site at <http://www.vre.org/programs/securityblanket.htm>.

Steve from Burke, Va asks:

With the new fares going into effect in July, do you expect the VRE to stay on budget for the remainder of 2009? Is ridership still increasing? Do you have any outlook for an increase in January 2010? Finally, when do you expect delivery of the new locomotives? Thanks! A Burke Centre - Union Station rider

VRE Management:

Yes, we should stay on budget through 2009. Ridership is still increasing -- at a slightly slower rate. There will be no fare increase in January 2010. We will get our first new locomotive in July 2010 and then four to five more by December 2010.

Mark from Leeland Station asks:

Any word on the express train timeframe? will there be a North and South express?

VRE Management:

For it to happen, we need to finish some punch list items at our L'Enfant Station. I hope that we can have it within the year.

Marti from Burke, VA asks:

I have several 10-trip fare cards. With the fare increasing soon, what do I have to do with these tickets. THANKS

VRE Management:

VRE tickets (except for Monthly passes) are good for one year from the date of purchase. Your tickets will continue to work in our system until they expire, even if they were purchased before a fare increase.

Al from Quantico, VA asks:

Why were the old cars put back on Train #304? Put the new cars back on, which we enjoyed having in May. According to your consist page, Train #304 is supposed to have the new cars.

VRE Management:

At the suggestion of a passenger, I looked at the seating capacity on the old cars and where they could most efficiently be used. Because 304 and 309 have more passengers than the other six car sets, I moved the older cars to these trains to add more seating.

phil from rolling road asks:

I've asked this before, and maybe there's a reason you don't, but: How about sending out Train Talks from a central email, not from individual VRE employee emails. My spam filters throw new names into spam - as opposed to me just adding one general email to my address book.

VRE Management:

The choice was deliberately made to have names associated with the Train Talk emails. This way, the emails have a more personal touch and do not look like corporate spam.

Jim from Burke asks:

Manassas Line 326 is more crowded than the 328 ... how about moving a car from one to other.

VRE Management:

Similar to a previous question about train #304, I have assigned the older cars with more seats to 326. Train 328 continues to have more riders, so it will maintain the current train set.

Esther from Fredericksburg asks:

In light of last night's debacle, where was CSX management? Obviously, the dispatcher contributed considerably to the delay -- having been on Amtrak 93 behind this, there was NO northbound traffic -- does CSX have a response, action plan, educational plans for dispatchers in light of its miserable performance?

VRE Management:

We were constantly in communication with CSX during last night's delays. Please remember that the majority of the delays were caused by VRE mechanical issues.

Elmer from Fburg asks:

Has VRE every considered a Saturday train to Union Station for the summer travel season? It would be more convenient than having to drive to Springfield to catch the metro.

VRE Management:

I know there is great interest in adding service, especially on the weekends and holidays. Unfortunately, at this time, we do not have the funding to make it possible.

Jason from Arlington asks:

Are there Automatic External Defibrillators (AED's) aboard the trains?

VRE Management:

Yes. There is one AED on a four car set, two AEDs on a train set with five or six cars and three AEDs on a train set with eight cars.

Greg from Woodbridge asks:

What is the definition of a train being late? Several Times a week VRE 300 is 5 or more minutes late in pickup at Quantico, Rippon, Woodbridge, etc...but arrives at Union Station on time.

VRE Management:

A train is considered late when it arrives at its final destination five or more minutes later than its published schedule time.

Rich from Gainesville VA asks:

My wife rides the train daily from Broad Run. When can we expect the new Gainesville Station to open?

VRE Management:

We just completed our alternatives analysis. At this point, we think it may be another four to five years before we can provide service to Gainesville.

Jason from Alexandria, VA asks:

I know for a fact that the reason trains were run behind 307 yesterday was because the crew never reported to the Dispatcher they were stopped and working with mechanical to solve the problem. I'm sure the Dispatcher would have gotten the trains around them if they'd been properly informed. That one's on the crew, not CSX as reported.

VRE Management:

I have heard about this as well. I think that there is more than enough blame to go around. In most cases of significant delays, there are multiple issues that compound the situation. You can't fixate on just one. I am looking at all the issues as I continue to investigate this matter.

James from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

So raising the VRE fares will improve the service on the Fred line from 77% to what?

VRE Management:

Not necessarily. But without the fare increase, I would have to cut service. Riders told me at the public hearings that they would rather have fare increases than service cuts.

Tom from Spotsy asks:

Does having the new engines mean that the trains will be able to hit higher speeds between stations? or just better reliability?

VRE Management:

This is what is going to improve our on-time performance. In addition, the new locomotives may be able to accelerate more quickly and pull more rail cars.

Mark from Fburg asks:

Why are the conductors making an announcement stating that VRE Management has instructed each conductor to write two summons per day? The conductors going as far as saying I need volunteers for summons because they didn't write their two? Is that the goal of the VRE, to make all their riders mad?

VRE Management:

I asked Amtrak to have some conductors to do improve their ticket checking but I never mandated a quota. We are looking into why this was said.

Louis from Fairfax asks:

I just looked at the new fares and they are obscene. How can VRE expect to stay in business when you charge so much money? \$385 for a TLC from Fredricksburg? That is more than some people pay for their cars.

VRE Management:

The cost structure for running trains is expensive; accessing other companies' tracks, maintenance, labor, and insurance costs, etc. Fare revenue from riders only covers approximately half of just the operating budget alone (that doesn't include capital improvement, such as station improvements or purchasing locomotives). While a TLC may be expensive for some, it may be cost effective for others to reduce their use of a car which cuts down on wear and tear and insurance expense.

Carl from Lorton asks:

I rode 307 home last night. We had a protect locomotive - and that turned out to be the problem. Should I feel good about a protect locomotive (i.e. it lowers my chance for problems) or should I be scared (two locomotives - twice the chance for problems?)

VRE Management:

I don't believe that the second locomotive was the problem, but it is still being looked into.

Bart from Fredericksburg asks:

I know that you have begun a tougher ticket enforcement policy. But I think you might be able to increase, modestly, revenue by having the conductors check tickets in the AM after Quantico and in the PM after Lorton. I have sat next to people who use outdated tickets because no one checks.

VRE Management:

I recently asked the conductors to increase their ticket checks and this includes checking in between zones to ensure passengers have the correct tickets.

Christina from Manassas Park, VA asks:

I hear the same people saying they could not validate their tickets because they would miss their train. Please do not make exceptions for these people unless they speak with the Train conductor prior to boarding. Let us be fair to everyone who pays.

VRE Management:

I agree. Our riders need to be on time to the station so that they can validate their tickets.

There are those who disagree with us. See the next question.

Dan from Broad Run asks:

Every month you say: "there are only two things you need to do to ride the trains" What can WE expect from VRE? What are the two things VRE must do, zero-tolerance, to run the trains? Seriously - if riders are held to a zero-tolerance standard, VRE must have their own zero-tolerance performance standards.

VRE Management:

This is certainly another opinion.

Alex from Rippon asks:

Dale, the covering at Rippon is inadequate. We all got soaked this morning. I know we aren't the Woodbridge station, but we could use some attention too. Not enough cover and it was gushing over the gutters and splashing us all. I pay too much money to be soaked for 50 minutes on a train.

VRE Management:

I am aware of the roof. I am trying to get funding to resolve this problem as well as the gutters.

Cyclist from Bristow, VA asks:

Thank you for completing the cycling policy. I realize that space is limited, but do you intend on expanding the cycling policy to include other trains in the future. My hours do not enable me to take advantage of the trains that allow the bikes aboard. Thank you.

VRE Management:

Our new bicycle policy is a pilot program. We are monitoring demand and suggestions. We will be making some necessary changes.

Rebecca from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Why is there no contingency plan for when a train is canceled? Yesterday was a total disaster for all Fredricksburg riders and no FREE TICKETS were offered for the inconvenience of one train being cancelled and another train breaking down for over 45 minutes.

VRE Management:

We do have contingency plans. As for FRCs, those who did not receive one can submit a request form. The form is on our web site at <http://www.vre.org/programs/freeride.htm>.

Lorene from Stafford, va asks:

Why does the VRE have speed restrictions due to heat - when other trains are flying past us? Is this something that will be happening all summer long?

VRE Management:

Heat-related speed restrictions affect all trains that operate on the tracks. Freight trains may be passing you as the train is pulling in or away from a stop. Heat restrictions are common during the summer months and are necessary for safety. We have only had two days of heat restrictions so far this year, once in April and one last week.

Dan from Woodbridge asks:

What sort of questions do you get asked at the Meet The Management events? Would it be possible to place some sort of feedback of these meetings on the facebook page for instance? That way you might not get asked

the same questions over and over again.

VRE Management:

We get all sorts of questions at our Meet the Management events. Often they are similar to questions we are asked here on the On-Line Forum and via email. Even if we did a Facebook feedback page, the same questions would come up again. We have a FAQ page and post archives of the On-Line Forum and those riders who haven't accessed those items ask questions already addressed. Besides, we are happy to provide the answers to repeat questions because it gives us a way to gauge what is important to our riders.

frances from **quantico va** asks:

why don't you serve coffee and donuts at your meet the management? i hear thats what you serve but all i ever get at quantico and fredericksburg is juice and granola bars??????????????

VRE Management:

Several years ago, we did provide coffee and doughnuts. They are very expensive and difficult to provide each week. Plus many times when riders didn't take all the doughnuts we purchased they were wasted. With granola bars, we can always use them for next week's event.

Steve from **Burke, VA** asks:

This is a small matter, but can you please stop playing those awful "Life on the Train" messages? They're loud, they're kind of insulting, and they seem unnecessary. The other morning there was a message lecturing folks about cell phone use, when the train was perfectly quiet. In fact, the only loud, obnoxious sound was the message about cell phones! Thank you.

VRE Management:

Sorry that you do not like them, but we do get feedback from other riders that they do experience other riders having loud drawn out conversations on their cell phones. I guess they got the message on your train.

Ron from **Jeffersonton, Va** asks:

The parking lot at Broad Run consistently overflows and people are parking on both sides of the access road from Piper Lane and along Piper Lane itself, sometimes as far as a half mile or more from the station platform. People walking along these busy roadways (there is no sidewalk)is extremely hazardous. What is VRE planning to do to remedy this dangerous situation?

VRE Management:

There are plans to build a parking deck at the station. However, funds need to be secured and would take a few years to design and build.

Norman from **Manassas Park, VA** asks:

There seems to have been a recent swap of cars between the Manassas and Frederickburg lines (the schedule cards onboard still say Fredericksburg). The Manassas trains that I normally ride now have the old gallery cars rather than the newer cars that we have been riding. Is this a permanent change? When will VRE receive more of the new cars so the old gallery cars can finally be retired?

VRE Management:

The trains are now on regular rotation between the two lines because of our new train car washing facility in our Crossroads yards south of Fredericksburg. This will occur until we can build a similar facility in our Broad Run yard. The ten new cars will arrive next February.

JP from **Stafford, VA** asks:

I agree with raising the fare instead of cutting service, but, at what point do you think riders will abandon the VRE for other options (slugging, Martz, car/van pools) due to excessive fares?

VRE Management:

You are not the only that feels this way. My goal is to keep fares as low as I can and maintain current service.

VRE Management:

Well, our time is up. Thanks for joining me and I hope to hear from you all next month (on July 1).
Dale

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