

## Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, April 15th at 12:00pm.



There are currently 48 questions waiting to be answered.

### **VRE Management:**

Thank you for joining us today. Looks like we have lots of great questions so let's just get started.

---

### **Booker from VA asks:**

I've seen this asked here before, but can you send the Train Talk emails from a central account instead of from individual accounts? It would be a lot easier to recognize them. Thanks.

### **VRE Management:**

Thanks for the suggestion but since we only have 4 people who regularly send out Train Talks, we would like to keep it that way to have that personal touch. That way, riders don't feel like a robot is communicating with them.

---

### **MPI from Boise, ID asks:**

VRE will receive new locomotives this summer manufactured in Boise, ID. VRE operates in Virginia. Have you picked a favorite for the Boise State vs Virginia Tech game to be played at Fed Ex Field on September 6, 2010?

### **VRE Management:**

I just got over my bad March Madness picks and you already want me to think about football?! Seriously, I am excited, like many of our riders, about the new locomotives you are building for us and hope our partnership will be a long and happy one, except when Boise State comes to town.

---

### **William from Fredericksburg asks:**

Can we expect service problems as VRE transitions from AmTrac to Keolis?

### **VRE Management:**

We expect a smooth transition when Keolis takes over the operating and maintenance of trains.

---

**Fred from Fairfax** asks:

On Monday, a Washington Post article called into question Keolis' preparedness for the change-over and intimated that an adversarial relationship has developed between Amtrak and Keolis. What is VRE management doing to prevent this and to assure a smooth transition.

**VRE Management:**

We set a strict timetable of deliverables expected from Keolis. We have been meeting at least once a week for the last several months to ensure a smooth transition and they are meeting their contractual requirement.

---

**mike from Broad Run** asks:

Any progress in changing the sequence at the Piper and Target shopping center stoplight? Every evening VRE riders make the left hand turn onto Rt 28 with no regard to vehicles turning out of the shopping center. In the meantime, please remind Broad Run riders to respect that shoppers may want to get home too!

**VRE Management:**

VDOT has looked into the timing and maximized the time for the left turn from Piper Lane. They cannot add any more time because it will cause too much backup on Route 28 which would also backup those coming off Prince William County Pkwy.

---

**Frank from Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

Good job on the steps at Fredericksburg! Any word on when someone will address placement of a pedestrian crosswalk from the FRED Bus Stop across the street to the station elevator. VRE riders getting off of FRED and crossing is a real safety issue. There have been several near miss pedestrian accidents at this impromptu crossing.

**VRE Management:**

Thanks for the compliment. We will work with the city on continued pedestrian improvements.

---

**Gina from Fredericksburg, Va** asks:

Why is it that whenever somebody asks when the Fredericksburg train station will be rennovated, the answer is usually "this Spring." However, the last time it was asked I think the answer was this year. What is taking so long? What's the hold up? Also will handrails be installed to help people down the new steps?

**VRE Management:**

We will receive bids for the renovation on April 28th. We anticipate construction will start mid-summer. Handrails will be installed.

---

**JB from VA** asks:

Why want you and the PRTC make nice with Fauquier County BOS.

**VRE Management:**

PRTC and VRE have met a number of times with Fauquier County. We will be setting up a meeting with Delegate Cole to set up a meeting with PRTC and VRE to discuss the possibility of the extension of service.

---

**Bryon from Broad Run** asks:

What is the final word on getting an express train for the Manassas Line?

**VRE Management:**

With limited track space, my answer is not anytime soon. However, through the public comment process I saw that this is something that the Manassas Line riders want and will continue to pursue the possibility.

---

**Hank from Manassas** asks:

Can the 1:15 train 325 be changed to 2:00 pm? If not why? Have you ever as the ridership about this time of travel.

**VRE Management:**

Changing train schedules is not as easy as it seems. The set that operates as 325 must come back to operate again as Train #329. Moving the train later could interfere with rush hour flow, but as we work to expand our service we will continue to look for ways we can put trains where our riders want them.

---

**alan from Fredricksburg** asks:

I am hearing that the new operating contractor has not hired enough engine and train crews. Is there any chance that you might have to cancel some trains when the new contractor takes over?

**VRE Management:**

No, we anticipate full service will be available on June 28th when Keolis assumes the operation.

---

**Michelle from Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

The stairs at the Springfield station are crumbling on one side and simply cracking and breaking on the other side. When are they going to be fixed?

**VRE Management:**

I will have someone look into this.

---

**Bill from Manassas** asks:

It appears that when Keolis takes over, VRE will save a lot of money and we, the passengers, are going to get new train crews with limited experience and minimal training on the territory over which they will be operating. Is this accurate?

**VRE Management:**

We picked Keolis because we want to provide the rider with the best ride possible. Of course, financial costs are always a concern, but if we get better service for less money, everyone wins. Any crew they do hire must be certified as an engineer or conductor.

---

**Tim from Woodbridge** asks:

I have asked this question several times without receiving an answer, but here it goes again, Why does the VRE reward some passengers with FRE tickets for delays and mechanical issues with the trains, while your regular riders using a "monthly pass" basically find these tickets useless, because if you receive like 5 of these FREs, that is basically two and a half trips. If you elect to use those FRE tickets and not purchase the monthly the next month it ends up costing you more in the long run. Why (even after bringing this to the VRE attention) have you done absolutely nothing to even that?

**VRE Management:**

This is not a new concern and while Free Ride Certificates are not as immediately useful to our monthly passengers, we give them a long expiration time so they will be more useful to our monthly riders. You may wish to keep them handy should your ever lose or forget your monthly ticket.

---

**Steve from Burke VA** asks:

In the news lately there seems to be some question about the change of management from Amtrak to Keolis. Can you provide an update on how VRE sees the management change for train operations? What should passengers expect on the first day Keolis takes over VRE?

**VRE Management:**

Keolis will provide full service on June 28th. You can expect the same cheerful positive service that you are accustomed to on VRE trains.

---

**MJBucci** from **Falmouth** asks:

When VRE starts receiving the \$2,000 per month for the mono-pole tower at the Leeland St. lot, will the riders at that station obtain a discount of sorts for putting up with the permanent eyesore ? How does the surrounding community benefit from this venture?

**VRE Management:**

The community will get improved cellular service in what was previously a 'dead zone' and also enhance the two-way radio project that will be used by conductors and by VRE for emergencies. The VRE was also able to negotiate a more expensive mono-pole tower, donated by a contractor, to help alleviate any potential visual impact in the area. We were given the option of installing a much larger, standard lattice tower.

---

from **Fredericksburg** asks:

Why is "Meet-the-Management" always in the morning? Most people do not have time to stand around asking questions in the morning, evenings would seem more logical, at least to me it does.

**VRE Management:**

Meet the Management is always held a time when riders are most likely to be waiting at the station. Destination stations are held in the evening while origination stations will be held in the morning so riders can interact with other riders and management. I will be at L'Enfant later today.

---

**Donna** from **Fredericksburg VA** asks:

Why have the conductors stopped checking tickets? I ride train 308/311 and my ticket has not been checked in the past year. I see the conductors when they are counting passengers but they do not check tickets while counting.

**VRE Management:**

Thank you for letting me know. I will look into this.

---

**Hammer** from **Fredericksburg** asks:

Is there a reason why the stations do not have vending machines {Leeland does not} ?

**VRE Management:**

Since our platforms are not manned, we have always been concerned with those who would be tempted to steal from vending machines. This is why our Ticket Machines don't accept cash.

---

**Billy from Manassas Park asks:**

Hi, I'm wondering if there are any plans for WiFi on the trains? Thanks for the great service. I love riding the train to work each day.

**VRE Management:**

We have plans for WiFi on the trains and I want to provide this service to our riders. Once our IT manager finds a provider that can guarantee a continuous reliable service along all our routes, we will consider the service.

---

**James from Frednecksburg asks:**

What are the laws or VRE's position regarding solicitation along the lots and entrance to the stations ?

**VRE Management:**

No solicitation is allowed on our platforms for safety reasons. However, you can apply for right-to-entry to be on our sidewalks leading up to the platform. The application is on our website, [www.vre.org](http://www.vre.org).

---

**Trevor from Manassas, VA asks:**

Are there any potential plans to alleviate the parking situation at the Manassas station? I frequently ride the 330 or 332 train north and notice the parking lot fill up very quickly during the 7:00 hour. I have arrived a number of times to find the lot completely full, and have noticed other riders make use of the old lot that is no longer considered valid for red permit holders (it even sports a new sign threatening to tow people). How are people supposed to ride the train if they can't park?

**VRE Management:**

We monitor the parking situation everyday and while the garage fills up everyday, there is usually still spots at the very end of Lot D as well as on street parking.

---

**Todd from Stafford VA asks:**

What frequency of fare increases can we expect over the coming years?

**VRE Management:**

I can tell you we won't have a fare increase this summer. We try to minimize fare increases, but it always depends on the local and state funding.

---

**Joe from Stafford, VA** asks:

What really happened on Good Friday? Who decided that the trains could not proceed but the Metro went unimpeded? Why was this decision made? How can this debacle be prevented in the future?

**VRE Management:**

honestly, Alexandria Incident Command informed CSX that they could run but "recommended they not." CSX was not willing to assume that risk. Later I brought the parties together to talk through the service disruption. Finally, I accepted responsibility for our trains which is when they were released.

---

**Jerry from Fairfax** asks:

Can you please ask the Fairfax PD to come visit the Burke Garage? There's a car they tagged to tow away in January, expended fire extinguishers on the pavement next to their boxes, and the garbage is accumulating again. This is practically a VANDALISM WANTED sign. I know VRE doesn't police it, but perhaps FFX county might listen to you.

**VRE Management:**

I have noticed these problems and I have told Fairfax County about it. I will continue to pursue a correction.

---

**Betty from Manassas** asks:

On train 328 the AC is not working hardly at all in some of the cars. What is being done to fix this issue. It has yet to work this Spring.

**VRE Management:**

I will have all the cars checked tonight.

---

**William from Manassas Park** asks:

Are there any plans for VRE to use SmarTrip cards?

**VRE Management:**

At this time, we don't have an easy way to get SmarTrip to work with our system. We are continuing to work with WMATA so we can be part of the regional system.

---

**Aaron from Rippon Landing, VA** asks:

I moved out of the city to Rippon Landing a month ago and I'm new to VRE (300 & 303) and must say...WOW! The VRE is much better than Metro (sorry Metro). Its cleaner, more comfortable, great staff and I'd imagine given metro's recent history I have a longer life expectancy riding with you. My only complaints so far were from 2 pretty long delays. One was from police activity??? My only other question, do you think you might have enough interest to support a later night train for those looking to have dinner in town, happy hour, take evening classes, etc.? Thanks!

**VRE Management:**

Thanks for the compliments! We are striving to make VRE the best ride in the US. I apologize for the delays, the railroad was shut down for precautionary measures for the day you mention. There will always be delays from time to time, but we always work to minimize those delays. Our on-time performance has gotten better over the years and we hope you see it improve further. We have plans for a later train but the funding and train storage for more trains are big obstacles to expanding our service.

---

**Marc from Lorton** asks:

Why is does the VRE train blow cold air all the time?

**VRE Management:**

The cars were designed to have the air constantly moving which has produced a wind chill effect on the trains. We are working towards a solution that will increase the temperature. Hopefully making the constant breeze feel more tropical.

---

**Michael from Quantico** asks:

Thanks for all the good work!!!

**VRE Management:**

Thanks for the compliment!

---

**Andrea from Manassas** asks:

When will all the proposed changes to the schedule be finalized?

**VRE Management:**

I will brief the Operations Board this Friday. All scheduled changes will take place starting July 19th. I do not expect any major changes to the existing schedule.

---

**Clator from Rippon to Alexandria** asks:

The demands of riders seem to be changing faster than VRE seems to be adapting. Can VRE look into whether or not there is enough support for a mid-day train in, an earlier train out, and a later train out?

**VRE Management:**

You're absolutely right. And we are in the probably the most difficult financial situation we have ever been in and don't have funding for more service or any more room in our storage downtown.

---

**Pam Walker from Haymarket, VA** asks:

I want to commend the VRE staff for their services. My question is regarding the possible changes in July to VRE. Is the group taking a look at the effect on parking with the change in which trains go to Union Station and L'Enfant.

**VRE Management:**

I will recommend to the Operations Board on Friday that no trains be stored at L'Enfant due to rider concerns.

---

**Deb from VA** asks:

I would just like to know who's idea it was to mess up a good thing by switching from AMTRAK? "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!"

**VRE Management:**

I am required by federal and state law to compete all contracted services.

---

**Jeff from VA** asks:

Will there be any public tours new the new Broad Run maintenance facilities?

**VRE Management:**

We don't have any plans at this time for tours of the Broad Run facility.

---

**Stan from Manassas, VA** asks:

Why do the interior doors of the train cars shut automatically when the outer doors are open and people are lining up going in or out? It seems 1950's technology to have them stay open when the outer doors are open. Everybody gets hit by these doors.

**VRE Management:**

It's actually a new technology. The interior doors are designed that way to maintain a consistent temperature inside the cabins. In other words the doors only open when riders want them to.

---

**ray** from **henrico, va** asks:

what is the status of the cameron run bridge replacement phase of the #1 track project between "AF" and "Franconia", along csxt's rf&p sd. thanks!

**VRE Management:**

The bridge is scheduled to be slid into place over Memorial Day weekend. Adjacent track work won't be completed until mid-July.

---

**Jodi** from **Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

I am glad to see that VRE is supporting Take your Child to work day by offering free rides for children going to work with their parent. However, the emails have stated it is only for children ages 11 to 18. My employer is only allowing children ages 8 to 12. My child is 8 years old and will be riding the train to work with me. Will I be required to buy a ticket for her?

**VRE Management:**

Our normal policy is that children 10 and under ride free with a fare paying adult any time. We are relaxing the policy for children 11-18 do not have to pay that day only.

---

**Cory** from **Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

Why arent people ticketed for parking between lots at leeland station? I understand people parking there when the upper lot is full but it seems to be the go to place soon as the bottom lot is full. It is only due to peoples laziness that they uses these "spots" as they dont want to walk the extra 50 feet. This makes it completely unsafe to walk up to the top lot when leaving at the end of the day. There needs to be something done about people parking in "spots" that dont exist when there are plenty of places to park.

**VRE Management:**

We will talk to Stafford Count Sheriff's Dept for some help with enforcement.

---

**Ben** from **Manassas, VA** asks:

When another train is running late, why make 2 trains late? For example, the Fredericksburg train is running late. The Manassas train is on time, until it must lag behind the already late Fredericksburg train thereby making 2 trains late. If the Fredericksburg is already late why not allow the Manassas train to pass it and remain on time?

**VRE Management:**

The dispatchers allow the train that gets there first to go through. On the flipside to your example, if already late Fredericksburg riders have to wait for a Manassas train, they would feel that we unnecessarily are adding to their delay just for the sake of on-time performance.

---

**Rochelle from Stafford, VA asks:**

I know this question has been posed before I have to ask ---what temperature are the trains being maintained at? The past 2 weeks especially, train 300 has been exceptionally cold in the mornings--what gives??

**VRE Management:**

The coaches are set to operate in between 68-72 degrees. We are looking to see if we raise the setting to be between 72-74 degrees and everything work properly. We can't set it too high because there are many riders who like the temperature where it is.

---

**john from manassas asks:**

What's up with the spent fire extinguishers piling up at Burke Center garage?

**VRE Management:**

Fairfax County is working to improve the lockers for the fire extinguishers and prevent the vandalism.

---

**CJ from Virginia asks:**

I am planning to keep a car parked at the Lorton VRE lot. What is policy on this? Has there been much vandalism on cars kept parked in the Lorton VRE lot?

**VRE Management:**

You are allowed to park your car overnight at your own risk. However, there are certain spots you cannot park over the weekend because of the Farmer's Market. Those spots are clearly marked.

---

**Aaron from Manassas Park asks:**

Do you just dread these forums every month and the utterly ridiculous questions you know people are going to ask? "Will the riders at that station obtain a discount of sorts for putting up with the permanent eyesore?" What a jerky question! A discount? It's like for the 10 minutes this guy is actually at the station everyday, seeing that tower is going to be such a horrible experience for him. You're a better man than I am. I would have just told him to quit complaining and get on the train. :)

**VRE Management:**

The one thing I notice during forums is that the clock slows down and is the longest hour. But seriously, your feedback is important. For example, the large number of comments of storing trains at L'Enfant made us reconsider storing trains at L'Enfant.

---

**Matt from Manassas, VA** asks:

What is the VRE management doing to ensure that the transition from Amtrak to the new operators won't impact riders?

**VRE Management:**

We are meeting with Keolis management weekly. We have an extensive implementation plan that they must follow. We are on track, pun intended, for full service by Keolis on June 28.

---

**Steve from Manassas VA** asks:

Thank you! This is my first time participating in the on line forum. First let me say I love my VRE! All of you are terrific! In the afternoons I ride Manassas 329, the consist is mostly the older cars. Can you tell me when 329 will get the new cars? Can you move the older cars to a different train and let other riders enjoy them for a while? Thanks

**VRE Management:**

This is something I will certainly look into.

---

**Michelle from Manassas** asks:

I just wanted to second the comment that the garage, parking lot D, and street parking are all completely full at Manassas. Both yesterday and today, lot D was completely full, as is street parking, and cars are parking in the old lot by ABC photo that is no longer a VRE lot (and where the city has threatened to tow). I keep reading responses on the on-line forum, etc. (including today), saying that there is space for parking at Manassas, but that is simply not the case.

**VRE Management:**

I'll have someone go out and take a look at the situation and discuss it with the City of Manassas.

---

**Phyllis from Manassas, Virginia** asks:

COMPLIMENT: there was good enforcement of VRE ticket compliance this morning on Manassas 333. Two offenders were caught in my car alone. This was reassuring, since tickets are costly (we all have to pay when others try to evade doing so), and since there is often a shortage of seats. CONCERN: Enforcement of quiet car rules. Perhaps a few more signs on windows. I don't know why people ferret out seats in a quiet car and then proceed to talk to each other or talk

on cell phones. Fellow passengers generally get them to knock it off, but a little more official enforcement would be nice.

**VRE Management:**

Thank you for the positive comments. About the quiet car signs, I will mention it to our mechanical team.

---

**Dave from Gainesville VA asks:**

I only get monthly tickets. I lost mine so got 10 trip. Next day I found my monthly, but now I'm stuck with 8 trips that I can't use. Does VRE have any suggestions about how I can get my money back for 8 trips? I'm willing to sell them at half price. Any ideas would help as I'm not filthy rich. Thanks

**VRE Management:**

The ticket is good for a year, so I would suggest keeping it and using it during a month you have to travel for work or take a vacation and buying a monthly would not make sense. We don't offer refunds but if you are willing to sell it for half price, another rider might buy it from you. The internet is wonderful for that sort of thing.

---

**Mike from Hume, VA asks:**

Has anyone considered re-laying the tracks from Casanova to Warrenton and extending VRE service to Warrenton?

**VRE Management:**

No I have not considered this, but if you feel strongly, I suggest you speak with the BOS for Fauquier County.

---

**John from Manassas Park asks:**

What is the VRE doing about the riderships lack of support for the VRE Management. As a long time rider I've seen the Ridership/Management go from a team effort to an adversarial arrangement, the talk on the platform is definitely not positive of the management and it seems that the management seems to see the riders as an opponent and not as a team member. I doubt this will get answered, but it's a valid question and should be dealt with seriously.

**VRE Management:**

I am sorry you feel that way, John. I have been here for 15 years and can say that everything we do is for the riders and improving service. True, there are obstacles to giving the riders everything they want, but we know without the riders, there would be no VRE.

---

**Judy from F'burg, VA** asks:

Can someone tell me what is so darn special about the Leeland Road station? I'm as anxious to get home as the next person, but I do not stand to detrain until the train approaches the Brook station and I still have plenty of time to detrain. But, EVERYDAY the isles are blocked with folks lining up for Leeland or F'burg, and they start lining up as soon as we leave Quantico. Do they get a prize if they are the first off the train? It's ridiculous to see adults act so juvenile.

**VRE Management:**

Queuing has always been an issue at our more crowded stations especially when there is only one lane to exit the parking lot from. Our policy is that riders should remain seated until the train has departed the station prior to theirs. I will remind the crews to continue to make announcements regarding this policy.

---

**DEB from Fredericksburg** asks:

Good Afternoon! Will you ever update the stations? Neither Fredericksburg or Lorton Station has adequate seating or coverage for the riders against the elements. Thank you for being there for us, I love riding the VRE!

**VRE Management:**

Fredericksburg is due to get station enhancements this year. We are looking to do canopy extensions at many stations and Lorton is included. We just have to wait for the right timing and funding.

---

**Loyal commuter from VRE Territory** asks:

What's with all the alarmist rhetoric about what will or won't happen when Keolis takes over operations - still several months down the road? Kudos to you for even acknowledging it. How about all of us just take a "patience" pill and see what happens before we start complaining about it? Is that too much to ask?

**VRE Management:**

This is certainly my philosophy as well. I am confident in Keolis management. I am watching the situation very closely, we are on track and we will initiate the service on June 28th.

---

**David from Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

Improving customer service has been a key component in these difficult economic times, to retain and increase customers. Is there any annual or other periodic customer service training conductors are required to attend?

**VRE Management:**

We meet with the conductors twice a year for customer service training.

---

**frank** from **F'burg** asks:

tell CJ it's perfectly safe to park o'nite at Lorton. I've been doing it for about 10 years and have never had a problem. Just the opposite, the Lorton "o'nighters" have a kinship and look out for each other. There's about 100 cars a night that sleep at Lorton.

**VRE Management:**

CJ here is another answer to your question.

---

**Stan** from **Manassas, VA** asks:

As an antidote to the critical questions, let me tell you the reason I moved to Manassas was to be close to VRE. I tested all the ways to commute to DC, and VRE was far and away the best. We riders just want it to be even better.

**VRE Management:**

I appreciate your compliment. Like you, all I want is for VRE to get even better every day.

---

**VRE Management:**

Thanks for another great hour, really. The clock is moving faster again ;). Hope to see you at L'Enfant this evening, if not, I'll catch up with you next month for another on-line forum.

Our next chat is scheduled for Wednesday, May 5th. See you then!

-Dale