

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, August 11th at 12:00pm.



There are currently 171 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Good afternoon. I am looking forward to another on-line chat with you today. I know that our on-time performance has slipped in the last month. I am working with Keolis management to bring it back to the level you have come to expect from us.

With that said, I have representatives from Keolis with me today: Gregg Baxter, who is the General Manager in charge of the VRE project, and Steve Townsend, President of Keolis So, let's get started!

Marissa from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Help. Love VRE but the equipment failures recently have been ridiculous. Why does it appear that there are now more equipment failures on a daily basis than just a few months ago? Things were going so well. And by equipment failures that includes the signal problems that have become fairly prevalent.

VRE Management:

It has been abnormally hot this summer and these heatwaves has put extra burden on both our train equipment and the tracks. We know this is only part of the problem and we are working to improve the elements under our control. We are bringing in additional assistance to improve the situation quickly.

Danny Delay from Dale City asks:

Are delays on the Fredericksburg line normally caused by CSX or VRE? And what is being done to curtail the volume?

VRE Management:

The answer really is both. We are actively monitoring all the delays and managing to mitigate the delays we do control.

Randy from Rippon asks:

Why is 302 having such a large # of delays since the new express train(300) was started?

VRE Management:

There have been seven delays since July 19th and there are various reasons, some out of our control, some within are. We are working to reduce the delays we can.

Larry from Lorton asks:

Any idea what was going on last week between Lorton and Springfield that required all these Fire Trucks? Looks like they were burning off some excess gas near the tracks.

VRE Management:

Not sure of the incident you are referring to. Usually if it doesn't affect the tracks and safe movement of trains, VRE is not notified.

Woody from Woodbridge asks:

How can 302 be late 10 minutes because of signal problems and still get into Union Station 5 minutes early(8/4/10)...but on other days 302 starts out 10 minutes late and ends up being 1 or 20 minutes late into Union Station?

VRE Management:

Every delay is different and depends on what is happening along the length of the route.

Bobby from Brooke asks:

Does 302 always need to be 10 minutes behind 300? So if 300 gets a late start, but makes up the time because it is the express train, will 302 stay late? To what extent does 300 affect 302?

VRE Management:

When trains travel close together, the second train will get slower signals designed to put space between the trains. If 300 is on-time there should be no effect on 302. However, if 300 is late, depending on the circumstances, 302 may be affected by 300 being late. Since July 26, train 300 only delayed 302 once.

Robert from Burke, VA asks:

Will FRC be given to the Manassas line #327 people that were skipped at L'enfant yesterday?

VRE Management:

Anyone that did not receive an FRC to the office and we will we mail one to you. Please visit <http://www.vre.org/programs/frc-request.pdf> on our website.

Bill from Falmouth, VA asks:

How long did it take to get all the Fredericksburg line trains back to the train yard after Thursday's CSX derailment?

VRE Management:

The trains left the storage track around Franconi/Sprignfield station at 6pm Friday night and arrived our yard at 10pm.

DJ from FRED, VA asks:

I've got expired step-up tickets, can I get reimburse for them.

VRE Management:

We will exchange expired Step-Up tickets one time as a courtesy, please fill out the ticket exchange form on line and then mail them in.

Train Talk from Manassas VA asks:

I receive the Train Talk every day for the daily download. This is where the rider receives information as to why the train was late. I noticed that on every day the train is late the passengers are being blamed for it. It says "longer than usual dwell time for passengers boarding/detraining". I wanted to let you know that the riders do not dwell getting on or off the train. They literally dart off the trains. I am thinking you as CEO are being provided some non-valid reasons for their lateness. If it is paperwork issues then say it.. don't blame it on the passengers.

VRE Management:

We can certainly work towards better identifying as the dwell times are not necessarily due to passengers. We are working to reduce those delays.

Carolyn from Manassas, VA asks:

When I come in to work at 6 a.m., I could get off at 2:30 - Could VRE offer a train for those who would like to go home and not have to wait until 3:50? It's a long time between 1:20 and 3:50.

VRE Management:

This is a popular question. Our contract with CSX does not currently allow us to expand the times we are allowed to schedule trains.

Suzanne from Burke, VA asks:

What is being done to address the mechanical breakdowns of the equipment. Since the new organization took over, I can count on two hands the number of times the train is on time. I am seriously considering another form of transportation and writing the Governor for help.

VRE Management:

The number of breakdown is unacceptable and I realize there has been a large number of them. We are bringing in outside mechanical personnel to assist in the maintenance of the equipment. The first arrived today and more will arrive by the end of the week. Next Monday you will see a major change.

Joseph from Woodbridge, VA asks:

VRE's recent service has been abominable, with incessant delays, equipment malfunctions, switch problems, etc., etc. What steps are being taken by VRE management to rectify this unacceptable situation? It seems as if nothing has gone right since Keolis took over operational responsibility from Amtrak.

VRE Management:

Certainly I know it seems that way. The truth is our on-time performance was unfortunately starting to drop even beginning in June. In addition to the mechanical delays which are within our control, there have been a number of other issues like signal and switch failures, brush fires, and heat orders, but I am committed and I know Keolis is as well to eliminating those delays within our control. We are bringing in additional mechanical expertise, HVAC expertise, and additional management oversight. Again this should be in place by this weekend and you should start to see this effect next week.

Doug from Burke asks:

In the last forum you said "Keolis will assume the service on July 12th. Let's plan on discussing the improvements in our August forum." Are the current mechanical delays among the "improvements" we should expect with Keolis? Separately, the south end of the L'Enfant station does not have a public address speaker. During last night's circus of delays the riders lined up for 327 could not hear any of the announcements, and were understandably perturbed when 327 passed by without an explanation. When will VRE finally put speakers in the areas where passengers are waiting for VRE trains?

VRE Management:

I will look into the possibility to having speakers at the south end of the L'Enfant platform.

Patient Rider from **Manassas** asks:

Hi Dale.. I wanted to let you know that most of your new crew did a great job handling the derailment and bad storms on 8/5. I rode 329 that evening. While we were sitting still for over 1.5 hours an announcement from the rear conductor came over and said for us to locate a conductor either at the rear of first car to receive our free ride certificates. This announcement did not sit well. We never did see the conductor from the rear of the train. Thank goodness the conductor from the front of the train walked into the two rear cars and asked if we received our tickets.

VRE Management:

Thanks for the compliments. As for the announcement, we have discussed with the new crews and reminded them of the proper way to distribute FRCs.

Paul from **Woodbridge** asks:

When is VRE schedule going to be on Google Transit?

VRE Management:

At one time, Google approached us about putting our schedule into their system. After a test phase, we couldn't agree on legal matters. Since then, it's been on the back burner.

Dave from **Brooke** asks:

Why haven't the performance measures on the website been updated for June?

VRE Management:

I apologize for the delay, it's up now.

Ed from **Burke** asks:

I realize it is very difficult for the train engineer to judge where to stop each time so the passengers can line up properly. But can't the conductors help him out? Yesterday, train 331 pulled so far forward off the platform that large groups of passengers had to go down the platform the length of 2 cars to crowd into one entrance. It delayed the departure unnecessarily. Thanks.

VRE Management:

I know that where the trains stops is very important for our riders. Keolis employees have

recently changed their job assignments on Monday. Operating a six-car set, an eight-car set, requires different spotting points. I am sure this will improve over the course of the next few days.

Heather from **Manassas VA** asks:

I'm sure you know that lately, the VRE trains have been less than reliably on time. For each late train, I receive a free ticket (I have 5 at the moment). I use these tickets and appreciate them, though on-time performance would be nicer, of course. Now I hear rumbling that VRE would like to discontinue giving free ride tickets to late passengers. What do you plan to replace them with? What compensation do you plan to give us for your lateness?

VRE Management:

I have no plans on eliminating the FRC program.

Andrew from **Haymarket** asks:

Can the VRE set a policy for everyone to move to a different entrance when a disabled person needs to board? It takes an extra 3-5 minutes to use the loading machine after everyone has boarded making the train late.

VRE Management:

We can work with Keolis on expediting boarding with ADA and non-ADA riders.

Alexa French from **Woodbridge, VA** asks:

Why exactly can't the conductors on the train be aware of what's going on and have to rely on passengers' cellphones/blackberrys for info. This seems so backwards in the electronic age we live in. It seems like they could have something to help them know and inform the riders.

VRE Management:

Keolis employees are not allowed to have any electronic devices such as Blackberries and cell phones on their person while operating the trains. I know this is contrary to the age that we are living in, but this is for your safety.

Christine from **Woodbridge** asks:

The new train 300 is working out well with on-time performance, and I am really happy this earlier option was added. However, it has become quite popular and people have to stand because there are more people than seats. Is adding an additional car a possibility?

VRE Management:

Thanks for the comment. I rode 300 yesterday and quickly realized how popular the train really is. The number of standees is the same as other trains I have ridden. As of now, there is no plan to change the number of cars in the consist. As I have mentioned before, VRE can not add any additional cars to our operating fleet because there is no additional mid-day storage downtown.

Steve from Manassas Park asks:

After several unsuccessful attempts to restore power to the 328 this morning, why didn't the train proceed more quickly without power. It was only after ~30mins that I overheard the crew discussing the option of proceeding without power. Are the crews aware this is an option? It could have saved us 20-25mins. Thanks!

VRE Management:

When a train loses HEP, which is the engine that provides power to the electrical systems, they have been instructed to attempt one restart and if not successful continue to proceed without lights and HVAC in the cars. This morning, there was some issues with the prime mover that had to be corrected.

John from Manassas asks:

Is there a chart that exists showing the maximum speeds allowed on sections of the Manassas Line (NS)? Can any steps be taken to increase the speed? An express train from Manassas to Alexandria shouldn't take more than 20 minutes.

VRE Management:

The Norfolk Southern tracks in our territory are especially curvy and rarely do passenger trains have enough straightaway to reach the maximum speed limit of 70mph.

Louis D from Gainesville, Va asks:

I really understand that VRE and its maintenance crews are doing everything they can to ensure the customers are having a great experience, however, the consist on Manassas Line #326 has to change. Daily we endure the lack of cooling on the older cars and it gets to a point where it is not really fair. Is there anything that can be done to alleviate this problem?

VRE Management:

The older legacy cars were purposely put on to the trains that operate on 326/329 because they have more seats than our newer cars and aside from the trains that operate with eight cars these are the most populated on the Manassas Line. The downside as we know is that the HVAC system cannot handle DC summers.

Julie from Washington DC asks:

Why are the trains so incredibly cold all year round?

VRE Management:

If you look at my answer to the previous question, this is why the newer cars are much colder. Based on rider feedback, they were designed to cool our train on the hottest of summer days.

Earl from Manassas Park, VA asks:

I'm overall pleased with the new Conductors. But please ask them to refrain from hanging out and socializing with passengers in the Quiet Car. Between their loud radio transmissions and talking to passengers, it's no longer quiet. Yesterday on VRE 333, a conductor found a passenger that she knew and they talked all the way from Burke Center to Manassas Park, when finally 6 or 8 other passengers had enough and stood up to complain, and a loud discourse broke out.

VRE Management:

With Keolis management here, consider this taken care of.

Sara B. from Woodbridge, VA asks:

I wanted to check to see if there are plans on adding an additional car to the express train as most Woodbridge passengers must stand until seats open up at Alexandria. If so when would it be added? Also, I noticed that you have not updated the midweek passenger numbers to the Express train since it has been running.

VRE Management:

No plans yet, monitoring the data. From what I have seen, most seats are full with a few left open and people are standing because they want to get off the train first. Some riders may see other standing and assume there are no seats left. I will ask the conductors to make announcements where the open seats are.

Sarah Jane Billington from Gaineville, VA asks:

A compliment and word of thanks. I speak for riders of Manassas 322 to say thank you for pulling up to the platform well in advance of scheduled departure. It makes a huge difference in passenger comfort not to have to stand in the elements or dash across a parking lot to attempt to catch a quickly departing train. We've expressed our thanks to the conductor, but want to do so here.

VRE Management:

This is something I specifically requested from Keolis, knowing our Broad Run riders appreciated it. I am glad it is working out.

Elie from Manassas asks:

Why can't all trains stop at the same point at each station. There should be pre-determined markers where the conductor stops the engine so that passenger cars always stop at the same point. There would of course be markers for 6-car trains and 8-car trains, for now, and when train configuration changes, marker locations would change. As it is now, each conductor stops at a different location. The most annoying is when they pull up all the way at Union Station so that the last engine is under the overhang. This generates a lot of smoke and noise pollution, right by the stairs and escalator.

VRE Management:

Keolis tells me that they are working with the railroads on placing car markers along the side of the right of way. This might be more difficult at Union Station.

Jerome from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

In the spirit of providing good customer service, is it asking too much to have the Keolis conductors to announce that monthly ticket holders are required to purchase new tickets prior to the first day of each month? Also, is there a 1 day grace period for purchasing the new monthly tickets? Thanks!

VRE Management:

Done.

Bob from Dumfries, VA asks:

How many of the VRE administrative staff ride the VRE on a daily basis? Does VRE have an attendance policy regarding late reporting to work due to "late arriving equipment" or other malfunctions?

VRE Management:

Around 16 or 17, which is about half of our staff including me, ride the trains. If the trains come in late, I stay late.

Marc from F-burg asks:

What will be the make-up of the Train #300/#313 consist going forward? Today Train #300 had a Sumo Cab and three Pullman Standard trailers.

VRE Management:

The express train/#313 will be made up of the legacy Gallery cars with the Sumitomo cab car.

Anthony Marsilio from **Washington DC** asks:

What is the reasoning behind giving out free ride vouchers when the train (VRE) is 30 minutes late? I, and I suspect many of your riders are monthly pass users. Although I appreciate the sentiment, I do not really get anything from it. Please respond. Thanks.

VRE Management:

It is a small gesture we extend to our riders to say we are sorry. Monthly pass holders have been known to save up the FRCs and use them in months when they are travelling or on vacation when buying a monthly doesn't make financial sense. Others keep them in a separate place than their Monthly just in case they forget it one day. Also, they give them away to friends, family, or strangers in need.

Edward from **Broad Run, VA** asks:

Now that Keolis has been with us for a couple weeks running the trains, can we get them to stop the trains in the same place consistently? I am happy with them bringing the trains up early at Broad Run, happy that they come with a smile on their face and are very courteous. Now if they could stop the trains in the same spots each time, it would make it that much better.

VRE Management:

Getting a train to stop consistently in the same place takes some time to perfect, give them some time to develop a groove. Even Amtrak conductors missed the spot once in a while.

Carl from **Annandale, VA** asks:

Keolis is very bad at handing out FRCs. i have significantly delayed three times in the past week (Thursday morning and evening, Tuesday afternoon) and not once has a Keolis conductor distributed the certificates. When will that lack of attention to customer service be addressed? And when will Keolis learn that schedules are supposed to be adhered to? The level of on-time service has become unacceptable & the lack of timely information unforgivable.

VRE Management:

I am working with Keolis to improve this area.

Ripper from **Rippon** asks:

I've seen the new engine on VRE 302 what a beauty! How is it performing and what is the total number of new engines your receiving. Any hope to replace VRE entire fleet with new engines? Thanks !

VRE Management:

Thanks, Ripper! We got a total of 19 on order and should have all of them in about a year.

Matt from Springfield asks:

Since there are literally hundreds of questions waiting from angry riders will you extend this time???

VRE Management:

I have been known to run over before, but with a lot of these questions basically being the same, I don't want to become redundant. I'll answer as many as I can and if I need to go over I will.

Vince from Burke asks:

Can you please revise your announcements that train 337 will originate from Alexandria to state that train 335 is running on time but is reporting location and status manually? Given the current announcements, passengers for 335 standing on the platform get nervous, try to use the traintracker, find nothing, and reasonably fear they have to run to Alexandria. Tell us the status of 335 before you panic us about 337.

VRE Management:

We will keep it under consideration.

Bill from Bristow asks:

What's up with the Keolis Engineers seeming inability to consistently stop the train even ON the platforms, let alone in the same spots? And while we are on Keolis did they bring their own mechanics to the game, and are they learning OJT? Train delays have been abysmal!! And to the point that I am back to considering alternatives once again. Thank you and please lead, follow or get out of the way.

VRE Management:

It is much harder to stop a train than you think, please give them time. While on-time performance has suffered as of late, the reasons are all across the board; switch problems, signals issues, derailments, trains breaking down, congestion, long dwell times, etc. The mechanics are the same mechanics as before, Keolis partnered with the same company Amtrak used to subcontract to maintain our trains.

Aaron from Manassas Park asks:

Kudos to the Keolis conductors on the Manassas line. They've had a lot to deal with in this first month and they've handled it like complete professionals. Especially, Helen on 328 and Chris on

311. Helen always has a smile and keeps it even in the craziest situations. Chris is amazingly friendly and great at keeping everyone informed whether it's routine stops or information on problems and delays. Great job!!

VRE Management:

Thank you for the compliment we will pass it along to the crew.

Larry from Fairfax asks:

Please revise the conductor training about the PA system. While the automated announcements are generally loud enough, the live announcements are very inconsistent. I can't understand about half of them for the low volume. An attention tone or beep might help my fellow passenger realize there's something coming over the speakers! They might even hush!

VRE Management:

This is an area we are working to improve with the conductors.

from asks:

In addition to the plastic ticket holders that you pass out at Meet the Management events, would VRE consider distributing ear plugs? I have some personal ones that I found very useful for blocking out loud talkers or other annoyances. I don't need them too often, but they are nice to have.

VRE Management:

Ha! That is one way to deal with it. We don't have earplugs in our inventory, but may consider it.

Always Late from Ontime, VA asks:

Delays on the VRE - Fredericksberg line - have been excessive. We (the customers) have an expectation - based on the published schedule of a certain service level. There is clearly a pattern of trains being delayed - seems to be OK - being demonstrated by VRE, which has become even more prevalent since the Keolis changeover. What specific plans have VRE implemented to deal with the ridiculous delays?

VRE Management:

You'll see a major change starting next Monday especially in the area of mechanical delays.

Rider for 15 years from BRISTOW VA asks:

Standing rm only on the 329 at L'Enfant. The 327 customers stood in 100 degree heat for an

hour. The 327 train passed us by with a 1/6 full train. My buddies that caught the train in Alexandria didn't understand it either, they stated there were plenty of seats for anyone catching the train in Alex. Common sense "PICK UP L'ENFANT FIRST, they stand out the longest. But wait, your VRE office employees got to catch the regular train at Alexandria. Thanks for thinking of yourself first - again. Thanks for passing out bad info and no water.

VRE Management:

We express trains not because we don't like certain stations, but because it reduces crowding and minimizes the overall delay to all trains. For the most benefit from expressing, it must be the next station or two. I know this never sits well with those who are skipped, but you are entitled to an FRC when you get passed.

David from Manassas, VA asks:

Manassas Line-- Looking at the last three weeks of the "Daily Download" I see on-time percentages of 18%, 25%, several 50% and below. There are 2 (TWO) days that show 100% on-time. In the last three weeks, the Manassas line VRE has been "successful" (success defined as "being on-time") only two days! I have to ask -- is Keolis up to the challenges of running the VRE?

VRE Management:

I know on-time has been subpar, but not all the delays are related to Keolis operating or maintaining the trains. For those that are, we are addressing them.

Ike from F Burg asks:

Lets here some real vision on how to fix the long term parking issues on the 5 of the 6 furthest lots that are well over 100% capacity. It is out of control and that along with late trains kills VRE growth at a time it should be expanding. 'Can't be done, budget issues, years away' are not vision.

VRE Management:

It's not a question of vision, it's a question of money. The capital budget has been reduced by federal subsidies, state capital has been reduced by the state, local jurisdictions have asked to keep their subsidy steady. In this environment, we are not able to build new infrastructure.

CD from Virginia asks:

Would it be possible to change the name of VRE to VRD -- Virginia Railway Delay? The level of service over the past 1-2 months has been a complete joke and in the same category as the Metro. However, I realize it is never the VRD's fault. Someone else is always to blame.

VRE Management:

I never said it was someone else's fault. I am responsible for everything VRE can control which

is crew performance and mechanical, which are a significant number of delays. We will eliminate them.

Cliff from **Springfield, VA** asks:

What are the operation plan and backup plan when working a station in a non-standard way? For example, when working the west track at the F/S station only the exit well of one or two cars will be used. While the public address system is used to make customers aware of the upcoming action it would be very good if staff started at the end of the train and went car by car and made sure customers were aware and which exit well(s) would be used.

VRE Management:

Thanks, Cliff for the suggestion. I will make sure the crews are ensuring everyone gets off the train when this happens.

Debbie from **Fredericksburg** asks:

Why is there a quiet car on the express train out of Fredericksburg? This train is packed full every morning and if someone needs to talk they will have to stand, if they can find room, in one of the other three cars rather than sit where some passengers want the quiet car rules enforced. I am an advocate of the quiet car but enforcing it on a sardine can will cause some passengers to not respect the quiet car on trains that have adequate room for all passengers who can make a decision to sit in the quiet car.

VRE Management:

The quiet car is back on #300 and while I understand your concerns, #300 is no different in capacity compared to other trains.

Jack from **Burke** asks:

PS - Thanks for not raising fares on July 1.

VRE Management:

You're welcome and I am trying very hard not to raise the fares on July 1, 2011.

Debbie from **Broad Run** asks:

Could you please have your maintenance people check the speakers in all cars on all trains? They either are broken, are turned down in every car so none of the passengers can hear them, your conductors don't speak loud enough in them or for the few soft spoken words that do come thru they are drowned out by the inconsiderate passengers that won't shut up long enough to try and hear an announcement.

VRE Management:

Funny you should bring that up. We are working to check all of the PA speakers in all cars. Conductors have been advised not to turn them down and will work on them speaking loud and clear so they can be heard over everyone else talking.

Nancy from Burke asks:

What's wrong with train 328? It seems to be the least reliable Manassas train in the morning.

VRE Management:

Rest assured, we are monitoring the on-time performance of all the trains, especially the ones that are more late than others, like #328.

Rick from Virginia asks:

When are you going to fix the problems with the locomotive on trains 328/331?

VRE Management:

Tonight.

Manassas from VA asks:

Thank you for joining us today for this chat.. "Steve Townsend, Executive Vice President Keolis, and Gregg Baxter, General Manager Keolis"

VRE Management:

Steve and Gregg say you're welcome. They are pouring through your questions and taking meticulous notes and are committed to improving.

Manassas from VA asks:

Why are the TWO new locomotives being placed in service on the Fredricksburg line only? Can each line get one new dependable locomotive instead? How come only Manassas has the old gallery cars and Fredericksburg no longer have them? I think the Manassas riders are getting the shaft!

VRE Management:

There is only one new locomotive in service operating on one northbound and one southbound train. Fredericksburg Line has two trains with legacy cars, Manssas Line has one. Believe it or not, we make every effort to give both lines equivalent equipment.

Marvin from Fredericksburg, Va asks:

Lost & Found - Twice in the past three months I inadvertently left items on the train. Neither was recovered from lost & found. Are you still recovering items for L&F or just trashing them? These items were not pilferable things. Thanks

VRE Management:

Process has been improved under Keolis, however, our recovery rate is usually about 70%.

Paul from Manassas asks:

Is there a safety limit for the number of passengers that can be jammed on a train? When a rescue train picks up the passengers from a casualty train, we're jammed in so bad I've seen a passenger have to get pretty adamant that he's not standing between cars! Surely, there's a limit. A crowded train like that is an invitation to a disaster with full aisles, stairwells, vestibules, etc. Can I also assume there's speed limits during such operations?

VRE Management:

Our trains are approved to operate at 150% capacity by the FRA but rarely do we operate a train with that many people. I know crowded trains are not ideal for the passenger, but most would rather stand than wait for the next train.

Luther from Manassas, VA asks:

How the heck do you pronounce "Keolis"? Key-oh-liss? Kay-oh-lee?

VRE Management:

It's the first one. Key-oh-liss.

Bart from Fredericksburg asks:

It's time to retire the electronic voice when there are announcements of delays. How can people take seriously anymore "other train movements" or "late arriving equipment"? You once said that someone is in your operations office whenever trains are running. Have a real person come on line and say what is really happening. People can deal with bad news as long as they know what is going on. And it buys you a lot more credibility.

VRE Management:

Our system is not built to do a live PA announcement at stations simultaneously; therefore we rely on the automated system. There are occasions when we make live PA announcements at individual stations.

Suggestion from Falmouth, VA asks:

Can you please let the conductors know that it is not okay to converse with neighbors on the quiet train. They announce that it is okay to converse as long as they are whispering.

VRE Management:

Brief whispered conversations are permitted in the Quiet Car.

Phil from Manassas Park asks:

Just wanted to write and say that the new crews are doing a wonderful job handling the recent difficulties. Technical problems are always frustrating, for both providers and customers, and I am impressed with the responsiveness and respect that the conductors demonstrate. Thanks for all of your hard work!

VRE Management:

It can be challenging and I am sure they appreciate your kind words.

Yamesha from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Hello, This is regarding the derailment incident last week. I'm aware that this situation was out of VRE's control and thank God no one was hurt. This is behind us now. However, I would like to know why VRE didn't arrange to have the buses pick us up from Rippon's station since it was the furthest point that VRE could travel. For instance, two "Fred" buses traveled ALL the way from Fredericksburg in ALL that traffic to Franconia-Springfield station. Maybe if we were able to unload at the furthest point (Rippon Landing), it may have reduced some of the wait time as well as some of the sitting space because we would have been much closer to home than Springfield. In addition, the buses that did arrive unfortunately were not labeled - from what I could see - which caused additional confusion. It was a little bit of a mess. We never know if something like this will happen again but will VRE consider this? Thanks for your time and consideration!

VRE Management:

Franconia/Springfield was used because they already have dedicated bus bays that are able to accommodate the number of buses we needed on Thursday. Rippon was considered but would have been difficult to get to and buses would have a hard time navigating the parking lot.

T from Fred, VA asks:

Don't expect a response - simply a comment: my only expectation/bottom line is ** on-time performance ** thanks for listening

VRE Management:

I hear you.

R from Manassas asks:

Kelois, nice job so far. Hopefully the staff will continue to have a good attitude and not take the customers for granted like the previous contract holder did.

VRE Management:

Thank you.

Manassas from Manassas VA asks:

I wanted to take this time to let you know that conductor Ellen has done an exceptional job operating train 328 and 329 these past couple of weeks. She has handled the many breakdowns well and has kept the passengers updated as she received information. She is the shining star of your Keios crews.

VRE Management:

We'll pass your kind words along.

Mike from Speckledwoods asks:

Any figures on OVERALL ridership since the new not-really-an-express train started, i.e. is it bringing new riders or cannibalizing old ones from the later trains? On the plus side, having looked at my old receipts and compared the cost of riding in 2003 to today, it's remarkable that you've avoided a fare increase for so long, after several years of bumpups that total about an 80% increase in cost before 2009. Thanks for holding the line.

VRE Management:

Still looking at the ridership numbers, so I don't have a clear idea yet. I know next to on-time performance cost is a concern. My goal is keep service up and cost down.

Aaron from Manassas Park asks:

The trains stopping at the same spot on the platform is a huge deal. I've never understood why. I'm thankful that the train stops, gets me to work, brings me home and saves me about \$250 a month in gas and parking. I don't mind walking an extra few feet if the train happens to stop at a different spot than where I stood yesterday. Even on days when the train does stop in the same spot, people still barrel over other passengers, cut each other off and smack others, literally, in the face with their enormous backpacks just to get to "their" seat. Grow up, folks!

VRE Management:

Everyone has their own pet peeves when it comes to their commute and we all need to remember to be mindful of each other. Even on the worst days, your commute will go better if we take some time to respect each other.

VRE Management:

As you can see, we ran a little over our time. You came across loud and clear to Gregg, Steve, and I that the delays are unacceptable. We understand that you see a degradation in our performance. It is unacceptable to VRE and Keolis. As I mentioned before, you will start to see changes starting Monday. It has my full attention as well as Steve and Gregg's.

Our next On-Line Forum will be on September 8th and I trust that the conversation will be much different.

See you then!

-Dale