

## Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, February 3rd at 12:00pm.



There are currently 92 questions waiting to be answered.

### **VRE Management:**

Welcome! Thanks for joining me on this snowy day. Even though it's winter now, we are already planning service improvements coming in July. You may have read about it in the Train Talk sent earlier in the week or on the VRE Update placed on the seats today. I am very interested in your opinions about the new train, additional cars, more storage space, and that some trains will have to terminate or originate at L'Enfant. If you haven't heard about it, we have all the info is on our website at <http://www.vre.org/service/comment.html>. Please send your comments via mail, [publiccomment@vre.org](mailto:publiccomment@vre.org), or fax it to us at (703) 684-1313. Final plans will have to be approved by the VRE Operations Board. Now on to the questions!

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**vick from woodbridge, va** asks:

Is there anyway that you guys can designate a car for the people who smoke and then get directly on the train?

### **VRE Management:**

If we did have a car just for those who smell like smoke, it would be hard to enforce and it wouldn't be very effective.

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**Lots of "Stuff" from Fredericksburg** asks:

Can I put my "stuff" on the seat next to me if I use an FRC to "pay" for that seat?

### **VRE Management:**

Hi, Lots of Stuff. Unfortunately no, all "stuff" must be in the storage racks, in the laps of their owners, or under seats and out of the way of passengers. We discriminate against "stuff" and allow seats for people only.

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**Betty from Manassas, VA** asks:

Do you answer remaining questions from the previous month or do I need to ask it again if it wasn't answered? I keep asking the same question and in spite of all the duplicative questions

that ARE answered, mine never is - even though I can get it in the front of the queue and no one else is asking the question. Quite frustrating.

**VRE Management:**

Once I finish each month, the questions are no longer answered. I am glad I could answer your question today. For those who have unanswered questions at the end of the forum, we answer everything that comes into [gotrains@vre.org](mailto:gotrains@vre.org).

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**pjd** from **Arlington, VA** asks:

Any chance that train 308 from Fredericksburg will have new ticket holders on the seats? There is one car that is missing half of these, and there is nowhere else to place my ticket.

**VRE Management:**

This train is made up of the older Gallery cars where the ticket holders are not as easily replaceable. If you would like, we can send you a ticket clip. Send us your name and mailing address to [gotrains@vre.org](mailto:gotrains@vre.org) to request one.

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**Esther** from **Fredericksburg** asks:

When will the elevator on the Track 3 side of the Fredericksburg station be repaired? It's been out of order for over six months.

**VRE Management:**

The elevator is the responsibility of the owner of the restaurant that used to be there. Our Facilities Manager will notify the City again that it is not being maintained.

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**HELENA** from **BURKE, VIRGINIA** asks:

THIS WEEK STARTING MONDAY FEB 1 AND 2 I BOARD THE MANASAS LINE AT ROLLING BOTH DAYS WERE 20 MIN LATE ON MONDAY AN HOUR LATE ON TUESDAY. SHOUDL I ALWAYS EXPECT THIS SERVICE I BOARD THE TRAIN 326 @6:44AM FEB 2ND GOT TO UNION 8:30 I HAVE TO BE AT WORK BY 8AM MY FINAL DESTINATION IS SILVER SPRING, SO ITS WAS RIDICULOUS TO BE AT WORK BY 9AM, MOST EMPLOYRS GET TIRED OF YOUR EXCUSES THAT THE VRE IS DELAY....ITS FUSTRATING AND JUST HOPING TO KNOW IF I SHOULD EXPECT THIS ON A DAILY BASIS.

**VRE Management:**

These two days were certainly frustrating but is not typical of how our morning service runs. Our trains have been averaging over 90% on-time and certainly I hope we continue with that trend instead of a trend of delays.

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**Billy** from **Manassas Park** asks:

What is the reasoning beyond creating the Express Train? The concept of an express train does not seem fair. It rewards those who live further away and punishes those who chose (and generally paid more) to live closer and therefore have a shorter commute.

**VRE Management:**

CSX will not allow us to lengthen our operating window. By creating an express train that stops at only the first few stations, we can stay within this window and offer additional service in the morning which has been requested by our riders for several years. Additionally, because the local train will operate just a few minutes later, we'll be able offer seating to our closer in riders who previously had to stand.

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**Ho Phat** from **Manassas** asks:

With Metro fares increasing will the TLC price be increased?

**VRE Management:**

I was just notified of the price increase for the TLCs. They will go up by \$4 starting with the April TLC tickets.

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**Angie** from **Manassas, VA** asks:

Could you ask the conductors to speak up when making announcements? I usually ride 331 or 333 in the evenings and the majority of the time I cannot hear what announcement is being made. Between the fan running on the train and the noise the train makes along the way (squeaks & rattles), it is impossible to hear them when they speak too softly. I'm usually even in the quiet car so there is no interference from passenger "noise" in the way. Thank you!!

**VRE Management:**

I will let the conductors know. You may want to mention it to your specific conductors as well.

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**Jim** from **Burke** asks:

Just a quick note of thanks and congratulations for handling the recent snowstorms so well ... despite the winter weather, the service has gone smoothly. I wish I could same for the junky locomotives that keep breaking down. But well done with the snow ...

**VRE Management:**

Thank you for your kind words about the snow. We have certainly been getting a lot of practice. As for the locomotives, the first one is scheduled to be delivered to us in July.

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**Steve from Burke, Va** asks:

Now that platform construction at Burke Center is complete, will the trains be using the newest part of the platform? Train 322 doesn't seem to use it in the morning but train 329 seems to be straddling the old and new sections? Just wondering if there is any policy on where trains are stopping now? Jsut helps us as riders as to where to stand and wait!

**VRE Management:**

The intent is for the train to stop so that it is straddling both sections. I'll keep an eye on this.

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**David from Bristow VA** asks:

I'm hoping the state or county can put some shoulders on Piper Ln at Broad Run, not for my sake (b/c I come early and have parking), but for the poor souls who come later and have to park in the mud on that road. That road is totally inadequate anyway. The option of going to Manassas instead would make the drive for those living in Culpeper even more brutal. 4 years is too long to wait for a new garage or spaces. I hope this is resolved for the sake of my fellow passengers.

**VRE Management:**

We are making arrangements to have the shoulders paved on Piper Lane. I'll know the completion date in the next few weeks.

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**Donna from Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

With the new Express Train planned for a departure of 505am, will the normal 515 train still run, or will the times change for all the trains? If so, what will the proposed new times be? Thank you for your time.

**VRE Management:**

The plan has the 5:15a train still operating at the same time.

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**Rich from Leeland** asks:

The Express train is scheduled to depart Frurg at 5:05, Why was that time selected? Was there any ridership input? Will there be a south bound express in the afternoon?

**VRE Management:**

Again, this part of our arrangement with CSX so we do not enlarge our operating window. At this time, we do not have plans for a southbound express train. However, I am still trying to get the Step-Up ticket price reduced which might make Amtrak 95 a viable option for some who are looking to leave earlier.

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**marie** from **Woodbridge VA** asks:

At the Woodbridge station, advertising fliers are being left on our cars. Is that permitted? If not, can you take action against these businesses?

**VRE Management:**

Soliciting is not permitted. If you send us copies of the flyers left on your cars, we will contact the businesses.

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**Davin** from **Woodbridge, VA** asks:

You have 71 new cars, but only 67 in service, according to your consist page which needs updating. Why? Just use the old cars as spares when you need to take a new car out of service for maintenance/repair

**VRE Management:**

Unfortunately, it is not that simple. At this time there are some of the new cars that are out of service for modifications.

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**Joe** from **fredericksburg** asks:

Is there going to be a fare increase this year

**VRE Management:**

No.

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**John** from **Manassas Park VA** asks:

Can the conductors please make a simple announcement that car closest to the engine is the QUIET CAR?(just as they do to remind us to keep tickets out and that we are on a Manassas or Fredericksburg line train) We continue to have riders who think they can ignore the rules and signs because they "are not disturbing anyone" or are talking on the phone or to their neighbor quietly. How about even a "Life of the Train" episode to remind?

**VRE Management:**

I will ask the conductors to make announcements.

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**Jason Torgerson** from **Woodbridge, VA** asks:

As ridership continues to grow, how flexible is the VRE with respect to adding capacity to the lines?

**VRE Management:**

Not very flexible because we lack storage downtown to store trains during the mid-day and we lack operating money to operate additional trains. Until the current the financial situation affecting federal, state and local governments has been resolved, what we have proposed is the most we can offer for quite a while.

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**Donna from Stafford** asks:

I don't actually have a question. I'd just like to applaud your pending attempt to add capacity to our trains and for keeping the riders in the loop and listening to our concerns. Thank you and keep up the good work!

**VRE Management:**

Thank you we are trying to provide the greatest good for the greatest number of people even though we know our proposal could possibly inconvenience some. However we want to ensure we consider everyone's opinion or comment before the final decision is made by our Operations Board.

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**RR from Burke, VA** asks:

Taking away service to Union Station will completely mess up my commute! I will have to find another way to travel into the District and abandon the VRE. Can't you take the train all the way to union station and then go back to E'lfant to Park? PLEASE DO NOT CUT OFF SERVICE TO UNION STATION! I am a long time VRE rider and would hate to have to leave and find another way of transportation. I don't even mind paying more if you would just keep the service to Union. Please consider me as you think about taking away service.

**VRE Management:**

I know that the Union Station riders are going to be the one who are affected the most. Because of the storage situation in our layover facility in D.C., this is the only way that we can add service and more cars to our current level of service.

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**Stan from Manassas, VA** asks:

Have you ever experimented with an evening train, say at 9pm, so people could have dinner/meetings/classes in the Metro area and then go home. I was prevented from taking evening classes because there's no way home except - AGHH! buses. Maybe just a couple of cars...

**VRE Management:**

Not to beat a dead horse on this issue, but trying to drop off passengers at Union Station and backtracking to L'Enfant would interfere with the other rush hours trains that are trying to access

the L'Enfant platform. Trying to make these maneuvers after the rush hour would interfere with the freight trains that have been held out of our service area during our rush hour.

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**kumar** from **stafford, va** asks:

What's a new FRC policy ? is it 30 min or 60 min, gurantee on time?

**VRE Management:**

30 minute gaurantee, but if you don't receive one on the train, please see our website for instructions on how to receive it.

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**Connie** from **Dumfries, VA** asks:

Is the New Express Train schedule FINAL? I was wondering why does it skip Quantico? Who decided which station to stop at and which station to skip? I sure hope the express train schedule can add Quantico to the list to stop at. Thank you

**VRE Management:**

The schedule is not final until the VRE Operations Board approves it.

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**Joe** from **Fredericksburg** asks:

With Spotsy joining the VRE family, will the entry fees and annual payments do to your budget and more importantly, our fares.

**VRE Management:**

Soptsylvania joins effective February 15th and is responsible for the prorata share of the VRE operating budget.

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**Phil** from **Fairfax, VA** asks:

I saw that we are adding cars to various trains. Are we sure we are alleviating the most crowded trains? Since the holidays, train 324 has had standing room only on the half dozen or so times I was late for the 322.

**VRE Management:**

I would love to be able to lengthen all of our trains. However, funding and storage constraints will only allow me to lengthen the most crowded trains at this time.

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**Scott** from **Burke** asks:

PLEASE ANSWER! Why make the express train BEFORE all other trains at 5:05 AM? That seems nuts. I had considered moving down further that way, if there was a fast way to work by lefant....BUT if you have it that early you really eliminate many peoples options to adjust schedule to work around that b/c most people can not start work at 6 am! How about moving things around to have express train at ~ 6:05 or 615 -- so some earlier people could go a little later and catch that and some later people a little earlier? Again -- most of us can't show up at 6 am at work so we get short changed!

**VRE Management:**

On the Fredericksburg Line, our heaviest train is the first one out at 5:15 in the morning which is 8 cars with standees. Many of those riders have expressed interest in an earlier train. By putting the express train as the first train, we can kill two birds with one stone by provifing an earlier and opening up seats on an already crowded train.

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**Cold rider from Manassas, VA asks:**

Why is the heat not set to remain on for the duration of the ride. I ride Manassas 330 in the mornings and when we board in Old Town the vents next to the seats and at the floor in the new cars are warm and generating heat. By the time we get to Backlick Road they have shut down and are cold to touch. The windows on the new cars let in a lot of cold air from the outside and the fan that blows overhead throughout the ride is blowing cool air. We have had significantly cold weather this winter and it is extremely uncomfortable to be cold while on the train. Please leave the heat on!

**VRE Management:**

The thermostat turns the heat on and off automatically. I will have the mechanical team make sure it is working properly.

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**wrs from Dale City, VA asks:**

Are you censoring questions about the 304 not going to Union Station? Everyone i talk to is upset about this.

**VRE Management:**

I am definitely not censoring comments from Train 304 riders but I am trying to answer all the questions that apply to the Union Station riders. Since this web chat is not a formal part of the public comment process, if you feel strongly about any of the proposed changes, I urge you to email us at [publiccomment@vre.org](mailto:publiccomment@vre.org).

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**Steve from Burke asks:**

If I remember correctly, your IT director had some New Year's resolutions to work on several projects including wi-fi for the trains, an iPhone/Blackberry VRE application and make the

platform TVs more informative with up-to-date information. Can you please provide an update on the various IT projects in the works?

**VRE Management:**

New Year's Resolutions are always hard to keep. I'd rather refer to these as ongoing projects. WiFi – still working on it and testing some equipment now. Mobile web page – in the works, however, the website redesign has helped some. Platform screens – the money for the screens came from funds needed to be in compliance with ADA regulations. That same grant money cannot be used for the improvements you are asking for.

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**Lucian from King George, VA asks:**

I heard on the news that construction on some sort of upgrade to the tracks on the East Coast is planned. Any forecasts on how long the construction will take (locally between DC and Fredericksburg)? What effect is projected for VRE during the construction?

**VRE Management:**

The big item in the news lately is the distribution of stimulus funds to develop high speed rail. On the East Coast, Florida got a huge chunk as well as North Carolina. For our more immediate area, Virginia received \$75 million for an 11 mile area between Powell's Creek (just north of Tim's Rivershore on the Fredericksburg Line) and Arkendale (an interlocking just north of Brooke) to add a third track which trains will be able to utilize to maneuver around slower moving freight trains. A construction timeline is not available. A third track already exists from the Potomac River to Alexandria with an extension to Franconia/Springfield currently under construction, which will be done this summer.

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**TL from Spotsylvania, VA asks:**

Why don't you just admit that you are taking service away from Union Station because you make more money that way?

**VRE Management:**

This proposal is not being made because of money. This proposal is being made to give our riders more service and more seats. If we do not store trains at L'Enfant, NONE of the other proposed changes can happen.

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**Danielle from Manassas asks:**

Can you explain more why the trains need to terminate in L'Enfant re: the update this morning. Why can't they go to Union Station, drop off passengers, then return to L'Enfant. Vice versa in the afternoon. Its a pretty quick ride. Our option are already pretty limited in terms of the schedule and this just seems like it will make things worse and we'll have to get to work later (wait 15 mintues or get on metro) and leave earlier.

**VRE Management:**

One thing I forgot to mention earlier, is that it is not as easy to change directions in a train as it is in a car. It can take about 10 minutes for all the changes and checks to be made in order to operate it in the opposite direction.

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

Train schedules go by train number designations (i.e. 322, 324, 326). Do you foresee changing the train number designations to actual times they depart their point of origins (i.e. for Train 322 would be Train 505, 324 for 545, 326 for 615, 336 for 1425)? Much easier to identify by time schedule.

**VRE Management:**

The reason we have train numbers is because different people board and detrain at different stations along the line. What might be a 7:20 out of Broad Run for you could be a 7:20 for another rider at another station on another train.

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**Marc from Stafford** asks:

Great news about funding Powell Creek/Arkendale track. It's my understanding that grant rules require that work be completed by 2012. Given the 30% delays we've seen in the new Woodbridge platform, who/what will be done to ensure that this worthwhile project gets completed in the allotted time. What happens if it's not? Will VRE riders have to pick up the cost? Express train is also welcome. Thanks

**VRE Management:**

The funding for the track is 100% funded, there is no cost to VRE. The grant agreement requires the work to be done in two years, once we receive the funding. We will manage the project to minimize the delays to any trains.

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**Scherry again from Spotsylvania VA** asks:

When will construction on the new VRE in Spotsylvania begin??

**VRE Management:**

A site selection committee team has been formed to determine the best site in Spotsylvania. Hopefully we will have a proposed site in 6 months to begin the construction and railroad work.

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**Gene Rye from Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

What statistical support is there for no train service at all on all Federal holidays? Some of the more obscure ones, such as MLK, Presidents, Columbus, and Veterans have many people

working and some of them must ride the VRE. The traffic would I am sure be much lower on those four days, but zero seems to be a bit of an extreme assumption. I would be willing to pay extra (say \$20) on those four days for some sort of reasonable service, as even AMTRAK cancelled its 0700 run on MLK day and my only other option is to drive all the way north and take the Metro.

**VRE Management:**

At one point in time we used to offer reduced service on these days, however ridership was too low to justify the expense.

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**Rick from Stafford asks:**

I've taken the VRE from Quantico for over 10 years. I've noticed lately that parking spaces are filling up a lot quicker than ever before with the main lot at max around 7:00A or so. Other than the alley/parking lot that is across the tracks from the main lot are there any other authorized parking areas? If so where? Any possible future plans for expanded parking in Q-town?

**VRE Management:**

Those are the only authorized parking areas for Quantico. There are no plans to expand Quantico at this time but we are keeping an eye on it.

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**Marie from Manassas Park asks:**

Could you possibly add an announcement on the trains asking folks who are lining up to exit the train to wait until the train reaches the station before they open the vestibule doors? Holding the doors open before the train even reaches the station just lets the heat escape, and in this weather that's not a good thing...

**VRE Management:**

I will inform the conductors and also ask them to make announcements about the heat escaping when vestibule doors are held open.

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**Marvin from Fredericksburg, Va asks:**

I am a monthly ticket rider from Fredericksburg to Springfield. If I take the express in July will I have to buy a monthy to Alexandria? Will there be an express in the afternoon? Thanks

**VRE Management:**

Yes, because the early morning Fredericksburg express train will not stop at Springfield and you need a ticket for the zones you ride. There will not be an express train in the afternoon. However, with a multi-ride VRE (10-Ride, 5 Day, Monthly, or TLC) and Amtrak Step-Up ticket, you can ride one of the Amtrak Cross-honor trains which act as an express train for Fredericksburg Line riders.

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**Carol Ann** from **Springfield, VA** asks:

"I know that the Union Station riders are going to be the one who are affected the most. Because of the storage situation in our layover facility in D.C., this is the only way that we can add service and more cars to our current level of service." That makes it sound like the decision is already made and our comments are not wanted, needed, or even taken seriously. Thanks a lot, VRE.

**VRE Management:**

The decision has not been made, however, the point I am trying to make is that this is an important decision and unfortunately it is going to be all or nothing. There is no middle ground, we cannot enact only half the changes, therefore your comments on this are very important. If you want the board to know your opinion please make sure to be part of the formal public comment discussion.

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**Angelique** from **Rippon, VA** asks:

Did it every occur to you that we would rather get to Union Station than have more cars? And you are most certainly not giving better service! It is hard to believe that you could degrade your service more without actively trying.

**VRE Management:**

I know everyone has their own opinion on what could make VRE better. It's important to understand that we have very limited options on what we can do. Again this is why it is critical that everyone participates in the public comment process.

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**Pete** from **Burke** asks:

Does an Amtrak train always get priority over VRE trains? If so, will this change once the new company takes over operations?

**VRE Management:**

Amtrak has national priority overall trains based on a federal law. The only Amtrak trains that are not given priority over VRE are the new state trains. With that said, I work with all of our rail partners (CSX, Norfolk Southern, and Amtrak) to develop operating plans that are beneficial to all railroads.

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**Sam** from **Lorton** asks:

Have any of the current conductors been with VRE since its inception?

**VRE Management:**

Yes.

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

I read an article stating the district has received a \$2.9 million federal grant toward replacing the rail bridge over the Potomac. How will this affect VRE service? Will the train be able to move faster over the "Long Bridge"?

**VRE Management:**

D.C. requested the funding and I do not know the exact plans but I think it is to study the replacement of the Long Bridge.

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**Joe from Manassas, VA** asks:

What train set will get first new locomotive?

**VRE Management:**

Most likely the ten-car set that will operate on the Fredericksburg Line.

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**John from Burke, VA** asks:

Will 329 receive the new rail cars? It has been a while seen that train set has had new cars.

**VRE Management:**

There are not enough new Gallery cars for all our trains, especially when we add cars and trains in July. We are looking at rotating the older Gallery cars between different trains. This is a possibility, but there will be one set on each line if the express service begins in July.

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

Will riders coming from the Manassas Park city center be able to cross the NS tracks near the platform?

**VRE Management:**

No. It is never safe walk across tracks unless you are at a designated area or are directed by a railroad representative. You never know when a train is coming.

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**Cassie from Manassas, VA** asks:

I work for the private sector in downtown DC. As such, my schedule does not follow the typical 8 or 9-5 pattern. Given this, the VRE is not the commuting option I would like it to be, since the latest train offered on the Manassas line leaves L'Enfant station just after 6:50pm. I often need to be in my office until after 7pm. I have many colleagues, however, who live in Maryland and take

the MARC to work; with trains departing as late as 10pm. I love riding the VRE, and I would love to make it the sole source of my commute. When will the VRE expand its downtown departure times, as MARC has?

**VRE Management:**

We would love to offer expanded hours of service. Unfortunately, MARC is funded differently. At this point in time our budget only covers our current trains and the planned changes this summer. However, the voice of the people speak loudly, so contact your local elected officials about the importance of transportation alternatives like VRE.

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**VRE Management:**

Thanks for all the comments. Lot of questions and concerns about our proposed service changes. I can't stress enough how important it is to get your comments in. They will be shared with the board and be critical to the decision making process. While we hear mostly from those who do not like the ideas, if you feel strongly in favor, we would like to hear from you as well. I'll see you next month on March 3rd. In the meanwhile I look forward to reading all of your comments.

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**VRE Management:**

-Dale