

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, January 6th at 12:00pm.



There are currently 61 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Happy New Year! I don't know about you, but I am looking forward to an exciting 2010. Yesterday we carried more passengers than ever before (18,315), so I am looking forward to the delivery of the new railcars later this month. New locomotives are coming in July. With that lets get started.

curious from manassas park, va asks:

Could you clarify the station smoking policy for me. I understand that the designated smoking area is at the north end of the platform, but does this limitation only apply specifically "on the platform?" For instance, I often see/smell people smoking in the grassy area beside the l'enfant station well south of the designated platform area. Thank you.

VRE Management:

The designated smoking area is limited only to the northern end of the platform, which the grassy areas at L'Enfant are not a part of. This is more of a courtesy since we do not have the manpower to enforce the policy. We will continue to put out communication to our riders to be courteous of others while smoking.

Nona from Manassas, VA asks:

I asked management about parking for the Manassas Park station when management was visiting the stations. I knew with the new building of homes that the parking situation at Manassas Park would worsen. And it now has. By 7:20 am the parking lot is full with at least 30-40 cars driving out of the lot in search for parking. This situation will only continue to grow. The answer I received when I asked management was that the city has not approached VRE about expanding parking. Don't you think that VRE should approach the city about supplying spaces for their paying customers?

VRE Management:

We have been aware of the parking situation at Manassas Park for some time now. The fact is that there are no more lots to lease or land to build more lots on. The only immediate recourse I can offer is to park at Manassas, where there is plenty of surface parking available.

Ed from Fredericksburg VA asks:

Who should be contacted about the need for an additional staircase at the north end of the Fredericksburg platform? Does VRE own the platform? Thank you.

VRE Management:

We just got the permit from the City and will start construction soon and, no, we do not own the platform at Fredericksburg, CSX does.

David from Manassas Park asks:

I don't have a question, I just wanted to let you know that I appreciate the job you folks do. I have seen an improvement in service. Keep up the good work.

VRE Management:

Thank you for compliment, we have been working hard. Glad you have noticed the difference.

kim from woodbridge va asks:

When is the new Woodbridge platform and associated structures scheduled to open for use? The entire station looks nicer, thanks.

VRE Management:

The second platform at Woodbridge should be operational by the end of the month. I am glad you like the look of it and I plan to look for funding so we can have second platforms at Lorton and Rippon.

Shannon from Woodbridge, VA asks:

I see that train riders have pass holders and clips. I am new to the VRE and the area and was wondering where to purchase these types of items. I commute from Woodbridge to Crystal City.

VRE Management:

We are happy to provide you with pass holders and clips FREE OF CHARGE! Simply send your name and address to gotrains@vre.org and we will ship it out to you.

Ed from Burke, VA asks:

Do you think there is any way to convince the newspaper companies, Post, Express and Examiner, to put at least one of their boxes inside the Burke garage? It seems silly to park in the garage during inclement weather only to have to go outside to get a paper.

VRE Management:

Good idea, I will see what I can do.

DEB from **Spotsy** asks:

When does the service company take over?

VRE Management:

July 1, 2010, Keolis will assume the responsibilities for operating and maintaining VRE trains.

Barry from **Brooke** asks:

With Metro losing ridership and VRE seemingly gaining ridership, what is VRE doing differently that is bringing on these new riders?

VRE Management:

We are a different system than Metro and serve different riders. With traffic worsening on I-95 and I-66, long haul commuters are looking for alternatives.

Steve from **Burke, Va** asks:

Is there anything VRE or Fairfax County and do about policing traffic in the new Burke Centre garage? Riders/drivers ignore the one-way directional flows and create terrible bottle necks trying to exit the deck. They also exit out of the "entrance"(not an exit) and this further creates a bottle neck as drivers attempt to leave the single exit. [Have there been any accidents in the garage yet?]. Maybe VRE/FX Co. can employ directional spikes (like at rental car lots) to keep us all moving in the proper direction? This would help keep traffic moving. Your insight would be greatly welcome!

VRE Management:

We rely on Fairfax County Police to enforce parking and traffic flows in the garage. Your suggestion about directional spikes is one we will forward to Fairfax County, who owns and maintains the garage. Hopefully they can resolve the situation.

Mark from **Spotsy** asks:

has the budget been approved? If so did the express route promised on the F'burg line make it in the final budget to start in July, 2010?

VRE Management:

The VRE Operations Board approved the budget and the next step is for our governing transportation commissions (NVTC and PRTC) to approve it. We hope to start the

Fredericksburg express train and add more capacity to the Manassas Line in July should the budget be approved.

DaGunny from **Spotsylvania** asks:

Since Spotsy is now onboard how about getting the Amtrak step up reduced back to perhaps \$5 to load balance the train loads? Train 93 is largely empty after leaving DC and it's a waste of seats and could alleviate crowding. Maybe a qtrly ticket to include free Amtrak rides? Be innovative.

VRE Management:

Your timing is impeccable, I have been discussing this with staff all week. I will see what I can do. It will definitely help alleviate the crowding on the VRE trains.

Carolyn from **Wdbrg, VA** asks:

Are the trains on-time more often now than they were 4 years ago?

VRE Management:

The answer is an emphatic yes, especially on the Fredericksburg Line.

Randy from **Rippon** asks:

What is VRE's policy about passengers sitting in the stairwells? With the overcrowding on trains I am seeing more and more people sitting in the stairwells. Yesterday, as I began to exit the train, as it was leaving the station prior to mine, an individual sitting in the stairwell refused to get up because my stop was their stop as well.

VRE Management:

We do allow sitting on stairwells, especially when trains are crowded but we do expect riders to be courteous. With the crowding on the trains, we will target this with our courtesy announcements.

fred from **va** asks:

there is standing room only on manasssas line train 329 south bound, on the upper and lower decks -- any thought of extending the train set to accomodate the passengers? the conductors can't check tickets of everyone boarding in Alex., and most of the time don't attempt to pry through the masses. Is this a safety issue in VRE's eyes? Any ideas to relieve the volume?

VRE Management:

We have plans to add cars to Manassas #329 if our budget is approved since adding more cars will need more manpower to run and maintain the trains.

Larry from Fredericksburg asks:

Will there be an additional entrance to the platform at the Leeland Road Station once the parking lot is expanded? It seems prudent to immediately improve to some extent the path from the ramp through the grass and up the hill to the parking lot that about 25% of the riders currently use when exiting the trains in the afternoon.

VRE Management:

Another good idea. I'll have the engineers to look and see if they can design it.

Larry from Spotsylvania asks:

Will the Fredericksburg VRE station parking lot currently reserved for Fredericksburg residents only be open to Spotsylvania riders when Spotsylvania officially joins VRE?

VRE Management:

No, Lot B will always be for City of Fredericksburg residents. The other member jurisdiction only lots will be open to Spotsylvania residents on Feb. 15, 2010.

Diane from King George, VA asks:

The Express Line that is suppose to start in July 2010. What was the reasoning for it to leave at 5am? Could there be another express leaving at a later time (6:30am or so)? Will there be an express for the evening service?

VRE Management:

Part of the addition of this express train is to respond to the requests by many Fredericksburg Line riders to have an earlier morning train. The Amtrak trains operate as express trains later in the rush hour as well as in the afternoon.

Kim from Burke asks:

Are there any plans to create a mobile version of vre.org? It's very cumbersome when you are trying to check the status of a train via a blackberry.

VRE Management:

Yes, we are working towards a mobile version of our website.

John from Quantico, VA asks:

I purchased a significant number of 10-trip passes for zone 2-6 and now I need to travel from zone 1-6. Is there any way to receive a refund? What if all I have are my passes and not the printed receipt?

VRE Management:

Please contact Milton at 703-684-1001 in regards to a ticket exchange.

Michele from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Is there anything that can be done to prevent the freezing of switches? How many Maintainers are on hand to quickly respond to a problem? Are Conductors or Engineers allowed or equipped to unfreeze the switch? Of course it is always the coldest of morning(s) when there are problems with a switch and delays result. If I, as a passenger, can anticipate the problem, why can't the railroad pros?

VRE Management:

There are already switch heaters on the switches that prevent most of them freezing over. While the conductors and engineers are not qualified to fix frozen switches, they try to keep a lookout for broken heaters when snow has fallen, even though the switch is aligned properly for them. However, not every switch problem is related to the weather. There are other mechanical issues that can occur as well.

Arleen from Fairfax Station, VA asks:

I'd like information on what is being done to address the ever-increasing crowding on the Manassas line. We ride train 326 from Burke Centre every morning. It is now close to or at standing room only when the train leaves Burke Centre. Thank you.

VRE Management:

Unfortunately, I don't have a short term answer for you. If the budget is approved, we will be able to make several service changes, one of which is to be able to add cars to Train #326.

Maria from Lorton, VA asks:

Why don't or can't the ticket machines accept cash or Metro vouchers? Purchasing VRE passes is inconvenient and time consuming as I have to go offsite to pay with Metro vouchers or cash, which VRE machines do not accept. I would greatly appreciate more payment options and purchase locations in the very near future. Specifically, a Commuter Store or equivalent in the Ronald Reagan Building would be great!

VRE Management:

Our stations are unmanned and if they were to accept cash, it would be very tempting for thieves. If you don't have time to see a vendor, you can use our SmartBenefits Reimbursement program where you can buy tickets at our ticket machines with a credit or debit card, mail in your vouchers to us and we will credit back your card. Visit <http://www.vre.org/service/sbvouchers.htm> for more information.

Ed from Bealeton, VA asks:

Can a cover be built over the entire station at Broad Run? Many passengers board in areas out in the rain.

VRE Management:

We are getting Board approval to extend the platform and canopy at Broad Run. We anticipate it to be completed in one year.

Maurice, Lorton from Lorton, VA asks:

Why is there a constant delay between Springfield and Alexandria in the morning? I would like to know so I can plan better when leaving in the morning. Is there a construction on the tracks causing the delay?

VRE Management:

Construction of a third main line track continues between Franconia/Springfield and Alexandria. Trains do operate slightly slower between these two stations because it is a work zone but has not been causing significant delays.

Ed from Bealeton, VA asks:

Why has the snow not been cleared at the already packed Broad Run parking lot? It is taking up at least 30 spaces in the back of the lot.

VRE Management:

We have called VDOT and they are going to bring in a front loader and move the snow, hopefully by the end of the week.

Dave from Broad Run asks:

Why are all of the VRE train numbers 300s? It would be easier to differentiate if, for instance, Fredericksburg trains were 200s (northbound), 300s (southbound), Manassas trains 400s (northbound), 500s (southbound).

VRE Management:

We do not run that many trains so all of trains can be in the 300 range. We do differentiate the train numbers as you suggest. Even numbers are all northbound trains while odd numbers are all southbound trains. Fredericksburg trains fall in the range from 300-313, and Manassas trains are numbered 321-338.

Faye from Lorton, VA asks:

Why don't all trains have pocket schedules for both the Manassas and Fredericksburg lines? It seems like every time I look for a Fredericksburg line schedule on the 307 train, only Manassas line schedules are provided. My daughter had to get one for me as I kept striking out.

VRE Management:

This has come to the attention of our Director of Rail Equipment who will make sure both schedules are on all trains.

Not enough cars from VA asks:

I ride the Manassas line 329 at night and the train is always packed when you get on in Le'fant and there is always people who have to stand. I'm sure ridership is up due to the \$230 transportation subsidy, so don't you think it's time you add another car to accommodate the increase in riders? Also, you say it's not allowed to save a seat for a fellow rider, don't you think if you added more cars, no one would have to save a seat? Your thoughts....??? Solutions??

VRE Management:

Prince William County has given us money for the design and environmental analysis for a parking garage at Broad Run. We are still searching for means to fund the construction of a deck. In the meantime, we are looking at ways to maximize the parking area such as restriping the lot or some sort of bus service to the lot. Until then, all I can suggest is to park at Manassas, where the surface lots have available spaces.

JAMES from FRED, VA asks:

The Leeland Station parking lots are maxed out. When do you anticipate expanding them? Will VRE be able to retain the spillover, upper level dirt lot?

VRE Management:

We will expand Leeland by 200 spaces. Currently we are waiting for approval from the FTA. Once approved, it will be about 6 months to construct.

Afraid to Fall from Manassas City asks:

I think VRE conductors do a great job overall but I am concerned about why they won't put out the yellow steps at Manassas. Several of the doors open directly over the street-a three foot drop and it's dangerous. The automated train announcements warn of the "low platform" and tell passengers to exit where the conductor is. The conductors seem to ignore this. Please help.

VRE Management:

I agree that the conductors should use the step stools at Manassas and will send something to Amtrak to remind them.

Ron from Manassas, VA asks:

Do you have any statistics yet on how the new Lynchburg run is doing? I've used it several times out to Manassas and declare it a winner.

VRE Management:

I have asked the state for ridership numbers but have not received them. I would like to see more Manassas and Burke Centre riders using the trains. I am working to reduce the Step-Up on all cross honor Amtrak trains.

iain b from gainesville, va asks:

Are there any plans to increase the amount of parking at the Broad Run train station? In the year that I've been riding the parking has all but disappeared with riders of the 7:20am train having to park in the tall grass along Piper Ln. I understand that the opening of the Haymarket extension will reduce the number of parking spots needed at Broad Run, but that is how many years away? The Gainesville area is showing significant growth and the parking situation is just going to get worse and worse. thanks! iain

VRE Management:

The following answer was meant for the above question, (hit the wrong link earlier):

Prince William County has given us money for the design and environmental analysis for a parking garage at Broad Run. We are still searching for means to fund the construction of a deck. In the meantime, we are looking at ways to maximize the parking area such as restriping the lot or some sort of bus service to the lot. Until then, all I can suggest is to park at Manassas, where the surface lots have available spaces.

Scherry from Spotsylvania VA asks:

WHEN is the Fredericksburg station going to be renovated?? This has been in the 'works' for

over a decade now.. AND are they going to put cameras and add'l lighting in parking lots esp. the gravel lot which has nothing..with the recent vandalism this should become a priority...

VRE Management:

Renovation to the Fredericksburg station will start in the spring. You should notice a marked improvement. We will add lighting to the gravel lot. I should know the schedule soon.

Richard from The Plains asks:

On the Haymarket-Gainesville Extension, is there anything newer to report now that the final AoA Report is complete? Can you advise what/when the next step is/will be? Although still in the distant future, very much looking forward to it and taking the car off of I-66.

VRE Management:

The AA report completed in May 2009 is the most recent study. Work is estimated to start March 2010 on next phase of study for environmental analysis and preliminary engineering. That effort is estimated to take 24 months to complete.

Mark from Fredericksburg asks:

Rumors persist that the status of the Fredericksburg City parking lot (Lot B) will soon change to open parking; no longer requiring a city sticker. Any insights?

VRE Management:

The City has not shared any planned changes with us.

Debbie from Broad Run, VA asks:

Mon. night I walked to my car that was parked on Piper Ln. and I kept to the left so traffic was coming towards me to avoid getting hit. Since it was so dark I stepped into a hole and almost fell and sprained my ankle, but I was able to grab a hold of a car and didn't fall. When are you going to do something about the safety aspect of the road from Piper Ln. It's too dark and you definitely need more parking? It's a big safety hazard.

VRE Management:

We are working with VDOT and improve Prince William County to improve the condition of Piper lane.

Jim Zorn from Ashburn, VA asks:

Inquiring about job openings: I hear you're a great outfit to work for and wouldn't put me in over my head. Not sure what I'd be good at though. My communication skills are weak, I probably

shouldn't supervise others and I'm not what you would call a good multi-tasker. But I'm a real nice guy and I've recently become available. Hey, maybe I could clip and count vouchers for you!

VRE Management:

If you can't work for Dan Snyder, what makes you think you can work for me?

Rachelle from **Woodbridge** asks:

Since you guys charge an arm and a leg for each way, when will you be installing wifi for those of us with terribly long commutes?

VRE Management:

We'll install it when we are insured that you will receive continuous service for the entire trip. And then charge you for your other arm and leg, and first born ;)

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

Do you anticipate getting any more of the newer gallery cars? The seats on the older cars aren't always as comfortable, and the restroom facilities aren't as good.

VRE Management:

Ten new Gallery cars should be here soon. Once they arrive, they will be tested, and then put into service. However, these new cars will not replace all the old cars and some older cars will be in regular rotation.

Tim from **Fairfax, VA** asks:

What's the status of a unified fare medium with Metro?

VRE Management:

We are waiting for WMATA to finalize the upgrade of their equipment. Once that is done, it will take another 18-24 months to integrate our system to use SmarTrip for payment of VRE tickets.

Mike from **Stafford, VA** asks:

Will the new railcars being delivered in 2010 be used to replace the older cars on the Fredericksburg and Manassas lines or will they be added to the current train consists to increase capacity?

VRE Management:

They will be used to replace most (but not all) of the older cars. An increase in capacity on a few of trains will occur in July should our budget pass the transportation commissions.

Vicki from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

If we witness riders drinking on the train what should we do? Ask long as they aren't bothering others I don't have issue with it but do feel they shouldn't de-train and get behind the wheel of their car. Also, could you also ask others to reframe from reading/view materials on the train that some might find offensive. I recently watch a gentleman looking at Maxium mag. - if I could see it so could the numerous children who ride VRE.

VRE Management:

Anytime you see questionable behavior on the train, your best source for action is to speak with the conductor.

Bob from Ladysmith, Virginia asks:

Any future plans on extending the VRE service to Carolne county?

VRE Management:

I don't think so. It took 17 years to get Spotsylvania County to join!

Tony from Burke asks:

Why do we still have huge piles of snow at the Rolling Road station? Parking was bad already, but now is even worse since several parking slots are now blocked with snow. One would think it could be cleared fairly easily.

VRE Management:

The remnants of the biggest snowstorm in recent history can still be seen all over our area, our parking lots included. We continue to work with Fairfax County to consolidate some of the snow piles and open up more spaces.

Jason from Gainesville, VA asks:

I get off at Broad Run station. Could you inform train attendant to continue making the passengers to stay at their seat instead of queing up by the aisle? The train attendant was practicing it for a few days end of last year, and that was a great idea. Somehow they stop making the announcement asking passengers to stay on their seat. thanks

VRE Management:

I will ask Amtrak to remind the conductors.

Todd from Manassas Park, VA asks:

Does the city of Manassas require you to ave a parking pass to park at the Manassas Station? Is there anyway to have a small campaign to inform the riders that are coming up on Prince William Parkway or even Hwy 234 that it is just as easy to go to the Manassas Station, how much better the parking is and covered. Put maps, directions and how to get passes in the monthly VRE paper and on the web site. Show people the advantages of going to that station and really push for riders to give the station a try. Setup a few days of serving coffee and doughnuts to get the riders there and get city pass

VRE Management:

Those are some great ideas and I will see what I can do to implement some of them. In the meanwhile, you do need a permit to park in the Manassas station, it is free and the application is online at <http://manassascity.org/index.aspx?nid=365>.

Mr. Kush from Lorton, VA asks:

Subject: Noise problems? Creaky, squeaky cars. Question 1: Do you have a system where VRE employees on board report creaky sounds and other defects to maintenance? Question 2: Why can't we have more than one quiet car?

VRE Management:

If you experience unusual noises in the car, report the car number to VRE using the Train Info form at <http://vre.org/feedback/mechanicalconcerns.php>. As for the Quiet Cars, they are not fully appreciated on all trains, adding a second would not be the best use of our equipment.

Wendy from Bistow, VA asks:

Could VRE put up some road sign since a lot of drivers driving on a one way street towards incoming traffic. Traffic coming in to the parking lot needs to make a right turn instead of going forward towards incoming/one way traffic.

VRE Management:

We will look into this and also remind riders to be aware of one way lanes in all our lots.

Billy from Manassas Park asks:

Is there a possibility of installing WiFi service on trains? Maybe partnering with someone like

Boingo could help subsidize the cost of installation. Thanks for the great service, I love taking the VRE to work everyday!

VRE Management:

This is currently one of the projects our IT Manager is working on. I told him to find a cost-effective yet continuous and reliable WiFi on our trains that covers all of our service area. Hopefully I can report something in the coming months.

Michelle from Woodbridge, VA asks:

How possible would it be to allow the Northbound trains at Alexandria get off on the opposite side of the tracks? Every minute counts and even when there's the briefest of delays on the VRE, it makes a world of difference for getting on another mode of transportation.

VRE Management:

There are a number of reasons why the station side platform is used at Alexandria, the biggest one is the concern for safety for anyone who may end up crossing the tracks. The Metro side platform is not wheelchair accessible, causing additional problems. Dispatchers currently put our trains there when we have no other choice.

Dave from Locust Grove, VA asks:

Why are there so many more delays on the Fredericksburg line when compared to the Manassas line??? Is CSX that bad?

VRE Management:

The performance on our Fredericksburg Line has increased significantly over the last few years. This has to do with the capacity improvements that have occurred along CSX tracks. Historically, Manassas Line trains were more on-time, but the months of September through November, the Fredericksburg Line had a better on-time performance than the Manassas Line.

VRE Management:

The hour went quick as usual. Wish I could have gotten to them all, but I never have enough time. As I mentioned earlier, this will be a very exciting year. We have a lot of service improvements coming and will be looking for your input in February. Our next On-Line Forum will be February 3rd. I look forward to chatting with you then.

-Dale