

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, July 7th at 12:00pm.



There are currently 52 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

It's another hot day! I have been assured by the mechanical force that the ACs will be working this afternoon. So let's get started.

Angelo from Manassas Park asks:

Is there a plan in place God forbid the train is broken down and we are stranded, for example, what happened recently in the MARC trains?

VRE Management:

When a train is disabled, we either couple the next train to get it moving, transfer the passengers to another VRE or Amtrak train, or get buses. In the event of the HVAC breaking down and the train still moving, conductors have been known to open the doors to get some air in the cabin.

Leroy from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

I understand situations do happen that is beyond anyone's control, but why do the train seems to be late more so then not?

VRE Management:

With the recent heat wave, we have seen lots of heat restrictions slowing the trains down. Also lots of disabled trains (Amtrak, freight, and VRE) have been congesting the tracks lately.

Randy from Rippon(VA) asks:

Why has train 300 been late 3 of the last 4 mornings? What does late arriving equipment mean?

VRE Management:

#300 has had some issues getting the train orders in recent days. We hope the situation is resolved as today it reached Fredericksburg on time. "Late Arriving Equipment" is a catch all we use since the delays are pre-programmed and train orders is not a selectable option. I will look into having a little detail added.

Wally from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Why was train 300 delayed 15 minutes this morning between Crystal City and L'Efant? Other train movements? There weren't any other trains around.

VRE Management:

That area was tagged with restrictions for track work that was not lifted properly. As a result, trains had to move at restricted speeds until it was resolved.

Larry from Bristow, VA asks:

It seems lately that the Manassas lines are going slower than ever through the Alexandria corridor, both morning (Northbound) and evening (Southbound). Consequently, trains are usually from 5-15 minutes late. Is this situation ever going to get resolved?

VRE Management:

These are temporary speed restrictions as a result of the new bridge that went up recently. Hopefully the surrounding work will be completed soon (and the restrictions lifted).

Michael from Woodbridge, VA asks:

I have a monthly pass. when we are over 30 min. late we are not always given free ride passes. It's a pain with all our work, to have to call in and fill out forms. Also, the only times I use these passes is when I go on vacation and do not want to spend on a monthly when I am only going to use the train for a few days. I want my free ride passes to last because most of them expire within a year. they should last two years or at least

18 months. or we should be able to swap expired passes for the newer ones, as the conductors are doing anyway. Thank you...

VRE Management:

All FRCs are now printed with a minimum two year expiration date and we work towards replacing the crews' supply when there is less than 8 months left until their available FRCs would expire.

Dave from Woodbridge asks:

When will the new Fredricksburg Express schedule be posted?

VRE Management:

It is on the website now. Please view <http://vre.org/service/service-information.htm> for more info.

William from Manassas Park asks:

When WiFi is eventually available on the train, will it be complimentary or will there be a fee?

VRE Management:

No decision has been made but I am leaning towards having the service be complimentary.

Lou from Stafford, VA asks:

Are there AEDs on the trains?

VRE Management:

Yes, at least two on every train.

Q from QUANTICO asks:

How many cars will be part of the morning express train?

VRE Management:

The express train will have 3 cars.

Whyme? from **Latesville** asks:

Why is traing 305 departing 5 minutes later under the new schedule when the other afternoonevening trains aren't being affected?

VRE Management:

The Virginia sponsored Amtrak #125 will begin that day departing at 3:55p from Union Station and will go to Richmond. Trains need at least 15 minute separations between departures.

Lee from **Manassas** asks:

What are some of the changes we can expect with the new vender?

VRE Management:

Keolis will assume the service on July 12th. Let's plan on discussing the improvements in our August forum.

J from **Manassas Park VA** asks:

VRE often provides courtesy tips in the printed bulletins but I have to say they are from your (as employees) perspectives. I suggest a forum where we the riders could post courtesy suggestions in our own words. I think they would be more impactful for riders to hear it from other riders. Obviously you would have to screen them to take out extremes, but I hope you will seriously consider this idea.

VRE Management:

Good idea. I want to see if I can implement it.

David from **Falmouth, VA** asks:

What, if any, changes will VRE be making to its ticket inspection policy light of the 30 minute delay to train 308 yesterday? I appreciate VRE's need to collect payment from all its passengers, but how are you balancing that with your stated commitment to

getting us to and home from work on time? Would VRE be willing to consider adding a flat-rate, single-ride \$20 ticket sold on board to resolve such situations more quickly?

VRE Management:

The situation on #308 was not your normal occurrence. The rider became belligerent and would not obey the instructions of the conductor and therefore the police had to be called. These are rare occurrences.

Frank from Fred Va asks:

Thanks for taking the right stance with "Brazen Betty" at Quantico yesterday. The rest of us buy our tickets, she should too. If "discretion" needs to be exercised as Stafford Supervisor Stimpson suggests in today's paper, that's the job of Judges, not the hard-working conductors on the line. Kudos to Amtrak and VRE, still the best ride in town at twice the price.

VRE Management:

Thanks for the compliment.

Paul from Woodbridge VA asks:

All trains are running approximately 10' late due to slow movement approaching the Alexandria Station. How long will this continue? Thx.

VRE Management:

I would expect them to end once the high heat ends.

Dave from Manassas, VA asks:

Will the Manassas line, which currently ends at Broad Run, expand to include services further south? If so, when and what will be the additional stops?

VRE Management:

We are currently looking to expand west beyond Broad Run into Gainesville/Haymarket at this time. Studies are being done to assess the best places for stations. If all goes well, we can see a new station open in 4-5 years.

Bernice from **Fred VA** asks:

Any hope of a weekend rate on Amtrak for commuters? We used to have one with the stepups. please advise. Thanks for the early morning express.

VRE Management:

Given the current financial situation with state and local governments, I do not see weekend Step-Ups returning soon.

John from **Quantico** asks:

Hope to see the on time performance improve the balance of the month. So far it is pretty dismal. And we have not made the switch over to the new company yet. Hopefully they know where the keys to the yard have been placed so 'late arriving equipment' will be kept to a minimum. And I know you apologize all the time but it does not help! Just tell us what the problems are and when we will get to where we need to go. Thanks.

VRE Management:

I know the on-time hasn't been what I wanted lately. I will do my best to keep you informed as to what is going on and keeping the trains on-time.

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

My question from last month was misunderstood. At Manassas Park station, the train stops so close to the crossing that once the train stops the gate arms go back up. Once the train starts moving again the gate arms don't go down until either the train is incredibly close to the crossing or the train is already past the crossing. This is EXTREMELY dangerous for vehicles as well as pedestrians crossing at the AUTHORIZED location (NOT TRESPASSING!). I invite you to come out to Manassas Park one afternoon to view the problem!

VRE Management:

I will look into the problem.

MJBucci from **Falmouth** asks:

I was reading the Warning signs posted along the new antenna at Leeland station the other day... one states that you are at risk if next to the tower... what is the realist risk to

us the commuters that park adjacent to this tower. P.S. what does VRE do with the \$2,000/month collected for having the tower on site?

VRE Management:

I am not familiar with the language on the sign, but will review it. As for the money, it goes to the maintenance and operation of VRE.

DEB from **Spotsy** asks:

Can we use the F Lot now? I see some others parking there, but don't want to in fear of having my vehicle towed.

VRE Management:

Lots A, E, F, G, and H are available for all commuters.

Ralph from **Burke, VA** asks:

When there are known events that impact train schedules, can VRE give passengers advance warning? Passengers might then take an earlier train to be on time for work.

VRE Management:

When known events are going to affect train schedules, VRE provides advance warning to our passengers via Train Talk and on board seat notices. As for unexpected delays, we send out notices via Train Talk and our Twitter feed ASAP, as well as updating our website and automated service line 1-800-RIDE-VRE.

Debbie from **Lorton** asks:

Why can't the Farmer's Market utilize the far back area of the parking lot that's not lit and no one uses?

VRE Management:

Fairfax County owns that lot and determines the locations of Farmer's Markets.

Larry from **Lake Ridge** asks:

How does VRE determine when to send an email out about late trains and when not to?

I have seen situations where trains are late and they are sent and some when they aren't sent. Doesn't seem to be a pattern. Can you help me understand the VRE email policy?

VRE Management:

We rely on the platform signs and PA to relay information about train 10-15 minutes late. Once the delay reaches 20 minutes, a Train Talk will then be sent out. Of course if we estimate a train will eventually be 20 minutes, we will send that out as early as possible.

Stephan from Manassas asks:

I wish to commend one of the Conductors - Brian Eden on all of his hard work and professionalism - he is the best conductor I have experienced on VRE and I for one will miss him dearly. One thing he does well which needs to be communicated to the new Conductors is the importance of communicating efficiently and audibly with passengers. It's really nice to know why we are running late or experiencing delays. It has been my experience that many conductors do not communicate as they should, or do not make announcements that can be understood by anyone.

VRE Management:

Thanks for the compliment. Please make sure Mr. Eden knows your feelings. His last day will be Friday.

Aaron from Manassas Park asks:

When I was picking up my SmartBenefits vouchers recently, I was told that soon I would be able to link my SmartBenefits with a Commuter Direct account and have my monthly VRE pass mailed to me. Is that something that will be available in the near future? Or is it something that's available now and I've just been missing out?

VRE Management:

This is something they can do now. Please contact CommuterDirect.

Jeff from Centreville, Va asks:

I just started riding VRE from Manassas Park. Why is there a quiet car in the afternoon but not in the morning?

VRE Management:

Welcome to VRE, Jeff! There is a quiet car on every train located next to the locomotive. If there is no signage, please write into gotrains@vre.org and let us know which train.

Scott from Manassas Park, VA asks:

I saw the deliberation a few months back regarding the proposed Fredericksburg Express train and terminating a few trains at L'Enfant. What was the result of customer consultation and the final plan?

VRE Management:

Majority of the riders that responded to the surveys stated that they would rather stand than have certain trains terminate at L'Enfant. As a result, we only added a short express train on the Fredericksburg Line.

Bob W from Manassas, Va asks:

Is there a possibility of getting a Manassas express train? Would this likely involve getting funding for a new track between Alexandria and the Potomac River?

VRE Management:

The limiting factors are train storage space downtown and funding to pay for the operation of the train. We have no more storage space downtown and no additional funding to add trains.

Bill from Fredericksburg asks:

When is the new third track around Franconia supposed to be activated?

VRE Management:

I anticipate the track will be available for service the week of July 19th.

Frank from Fredericksburg VA asks:

Generally when trains are significantly late, FRCs are not distributed. Instead, riders are urged to down-load and fill-out an on-line form, copy the train ticket and mail everything

to VRE. This is a lot of extra effort that compounds the stress of the late train. Can you change procedures so FRCs are distributed on-board? Thank you

VRE Management:

Our policy is to hand out FRCs on board during the qualifying delay when possible. When this is not possible, our policy is to have riders apply for them. We are trying to make this process easier by making the PDFs fillable and being able to submit it through email.

Stan from Manassas asks:

I parked in one of the new spaces allocated by Manassas this morning. Thanks for the successful work! Another success for VRE is your 8% growth rate on the Manassas line - I think that means 50 new riders a year from the Manassas station - what does Manassas plan to do with their cars? Success always bring problems.

VRE Management:

Thanks for the compliment. We are still working with the City of Manassas to add additional car spaces. I'll let you know how it goes.

ian b from Gainesville, VA asks:

I normally ride the 328/330 and 335/337 Manassas trains and with the upcoming change with Keolis how come we haven't seen any of the new Kelois conductors on our trains? Wouldn't it make sense for the new conductors to be getting hands-on training with the current, experienced conductors? Also, any updates to the proposed parking improvements at Broad Run, ie surveying, etc for a garage? thanks! iain

VRE Management:

We ran a full dress rehearsal on July 5th with Keolis. It was very successful. We need to have a little additional training on the automated announcing system. This week Keolis engineers are riding with Amtrak engineers on all trains. In addition, Keolis conductors have been riding the trains to get more familiar with the operation. Keolis will assume the operation on July 12th and I do not anticipate any major problems.

Russ from Fredericksburg asks:

Any progress being made on the idea of wi-fi on the trains? What is the anticipated date this service will become available?

VRE Management:

Still trying to make it reliable. No estimated date.

SpotsyVet from Spotsylvania, VA asks:

What is the status of the Spotsylvania station and where will it be located?

VRE Management:

I anticipate by the end of the summer, we will have a station location identified and I will be able to tell you where it is.

Jack from Manassas VA asks:

Since the Quiet Cars is a registered service of AMTRACK, are the quiet cars going to still be available? If so, is VRE going to pay for this service from AMTRACK adding to the already high costs of operations?

VRE Management:

The Quiet Cars will stay and we will not have to pay Amtrak for the copyright.

RichG from Manassas asks:

We apparently had the A/C out on the car I rode in on this morning (Train 322) we didn't notice the sign on the door in the vestibule getting on the train since the doors retract into the pocket when open. We noticed it was hotter than normal on the ride - then we saw the sign in the door window upon exiting. Point being it is not the best place to put-up a sign on the door to the car that retracts into the pocket when open. Reminds me of the sign on the "high voltage" perimeter fence which reads "WARNING: High Voltage -- to touch would mean instant death - violators will be prosecuted". :-)

VRE Management:

Thanks for the suggestion.

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

Can we please re-visit an express train idea for the Manassas line?

VRE Management:

I am always open to it, however, more riders ask for a later night train on the Manassas Line.

Frank from **Stafford** asks:

Dale, Do you think we will see any increase in performance with Keolis? Can you give some examples? Thanks,

VRE Management:

Regardless of who got the contract, we wrote in incentives to encourage better service and deterrents to discourage bad service.

Rich from **Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

I was all set to change my work schedule in anticipation of the express train, until I saw the schedule. Only a 7 minute shorter ride? What happened to the express part?

VRE Management:

It will skip 4 stations and get you in 20 minutes earlier than current #300 does. We may tweak the schedule a little once we have enough data to do so.

Doug from **Burke** asks:

I'd like to give a small gift to some of the Amtrak personnel that have helped make my commutes bearable. Can they accept small gifts from passengers?

VRE Management:

By all means Doug, I am sure they will appreciate it.

Jen from **Burke, VA** asks:

I generally ride 326 to DC and 327 to Burke Centre...neither train seems to be on time

anymore, there seem to be so many slow areas. If this is related to heat restrictions, why isn't that announced? It used to be? Thank you!

VRE Management:

There are heat restrictions on the CSX portion which is Alexandria and north. However, there are speed restrictions south of Alexandria due to the new bridge that was recently put in place over the Norfolk Southern tracks south of Alexandria. Both will eventually be removed.

Robert J. from **Woodbridge** asks:

Does a delay based on an unruly passenger qualify for a FRC?

VRE Management:

Any delay that results a train being 30 minutes late or more qualifies for an FRC. However, yesterday's delay due to an unruly passenger did not reach that threshold.

Mike from **Manassas** asks:

Could your web producers change the "refresh" feature on this chat so that it doesn't jump back to the top of the page? Thanks!

VRE Management:

I will look into it. In the meantime I suggest that you hit refresh yourself, as it will go back to where you were looking.

Sarah from **Woodbridge, VA** asks:

My understanding is that express train will consist of 3 cars. With the amount of people from Fredericksburg and Leeland, is there any concern for the Woodbridge folks having room on the train by the time it arrives in Woodbridge to fit everyone? Will an option to add more cars to the Express train be available if needed? I don't want to have to stand the entire trip.

VRE Management:

Three cars is all I had room to add to our service due to space and configuration limitations in our mid-day storage yard. I am not sure I can change much in the immediate future, but we will see.

Steve from Burke asks:

The most recent newsletter had a story about VRE "investigating" wi-fi for the trains. I found it a bit of a tease as you have talked about "investigating" wi-fi for at least two years. Everyone is excited about the potential but I wonder if you will still be investigating a year from now. Is it for real and what's the timeline? We're keeping the hope alive!

VRE Management:

Keep it alive, Steve! Don't hold me to a date Steve but our IT manager is looking for a solution. I told him my requirements is that is the service be continuous and reliable on both lines since I know significant dead spots exist on both.

Mike from Burke, VA asks:

When will the slow trains be done? It has been a couple of months of this. It is very frustrating when you have to pick up your children from daycare and I am late because the train is late.

VRE Management:

Hopefully soon. Heat restrictions and slow orders around the new bridge have slowed a lot of the trains. Do you know about or Security Blanket program? VRE will reimburse some of the daycare costs due to delayed trains. See <http://www.vre.org/programs/securityblanket.htm> for more details.

Eileen from Fredericksburg, Virginia asks:

My concern is the new management company which will be serving VRE. Since AMTRAK has priority over VRE for trains proceeding when backed up, it would seem to me that they would never have to give permission for a VRE train to proceed. I expect there will be hundreds of delays. I would ask that VRE stays with AMTRAK.

VRE Management:

Every situation is different. Sometimes Amtrak are allowed to go first due to circumstances, but in the Union Station terminal, we have an understanding that on time VRE trains will depart before delayed Amtrak trains. When delays happen out on the railroad, decisions are made by a CSX or NS dispatcher.

Ken from Fredericksburg VA asks:

What is the standard for using the handicap ramp for letting people off and on the train? I am asking because some conductors use the ramp and block one set of steps for everyone else getting off. Other conductors let everyone off the train utilizing the full set of steps, and then the ramp is deployed. It seems that doing it this way is faster for everyone onboard. Thank you

VRE Management:

There is no policy, it is at the discretion of the conductor.

John from Alexandria asks:

On Tuesday July 6, Train 308 sat at Quantico for quite a while. Later it was explained that an unruly passenger was being dealt with. What are the details and why did it take so long? Thanks

VRE Management:

We investigated the situation and the passenger was especially unruly. The conductor felt that after repeated attempts to resolve the situation, the passenger was a threat to him and the other passengers and asked for authorities to help.

Stan from Manassas VA asks:

I know the counties that VRE travels through pay something. Do the cities it travels through also contribute?

VRE Management:

Yes, the cities of Alexandria, Manassas, Manassas Park, Fredericksburg all contribute, as well as the other counties we serve.

Steve from Burke, VA asks:

Hi Dale, I'm a 3.5 year loyal rider and am glad to know new locomotives and cars are on the way! With this current heat wave, the cars are very hot on train 329 (specifically the 3rd car back from locomotive). This seems to be a permanent condition. Has a service

call been placed or are we just going to have to sweat it out? Finally, will 329 every have a newer train set or are we just cursed with this old train set forever?

VRE Management:

We will look at switching around equipment after all the new changes take place. Our mechanics have repeatedly made sure the HVAC works on the older coaches and they do. Unfortunately they do not hold the temperature as well due to their age and this is unlikely to change.

Kevin from asks:

Whatever your website is trying to do with worldlingo.com is really slowing it down.

VRE Management:

I have noticed it is slow today, but not in the past. We will look into it.

Gary from **Woodbridge, VA** asks:

I would like to propose a technical / business solution to allow SmartPass holders to use those accounts to purchase per-ride tickets on VRE. To whom would I send my proposal?

VRE Management:

Please forward all suggestions to gotrains@vre.org.

John from **Fredericksburg** asks:

How many cars is the express train going to have. I heard 3, let me say now that 3 is not going to be enough, regardless of what your polling data shows.

VRE Management:

It may not be enough, but it is all we can run. We can only store three more cars north of Union Station and the storage yard is at capacity. We are limited in what we can do due to storage capacity.

Paul from **Manassas, VA** asks:

Any plans to replace the old passenger cars anytime soon? Statistically, are there more equipment issues (A/C, power outages) on the older equipment anyhow?

VRE Management:

No plans to get rid of all the old cars. And no difference with equipment problems.

VRE Management:

Thanks for joining us today. As I mentioned during the forum, Keolis will assume the service on July 12th. In addition, the express train will start on July 19th. I know many of you are concerned it will only be three cars but it is all we can run at this time. We will continue to make adjustments where we can to accommodate the riders. I will see you again on August 11th. Have a great summer.

-Dale