

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, June 2nd at 12:00pm.



There are currently 40 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Welcome to our monthly On-Line Forum! Looks like a lot of great questions so lets get started.

Chris from Burke, VA asks:

Can you please provide some specifics on the transition to Keolis? How many conductors have they hired, how many more need to be hired? What are the biggest remaining steps? Is Amtrak being helpful in the transition? Simply saying everything is on track for a smooth transition doesn't provide enough information.

VRE Management:

Currently Keolis has told us they have hired a sufficient number of engineer and conductors to operate service starting on the 28th. Currently those employees are going through rules testing and obtaining qualifications on all three railroads, CSX, NS, and Amtrak. I do not anticipate any problems on June 28th.

Don from Fairfax Station, VA asks:

The Burke Centre parking garage is filthy. It's been like that for months. I've contacted VRE several times about this, but nothing ever happens - not even on a weekend cars were supposed to not park there to while it was to have been cleaned. It wasn't. What can be done about this?

VRE Management:

Please send in specific issues to gotrains@vre.org and we will forward it to Fairfax County who owns and maintains the parking facility at Burke Centre.

Ed from Fairfax asks:

So, I guess the newspaper companies don't want to put any of their boxes inside the garage, huh? Also, the two stations I use, Burke and L'Enfant, don't have speakers on the far end of the platform..where the quiet car passengers normally line up. Are there any plans to install additional speakers so everyone can hear the announcements?

VRE Management:

We have contacted Fairfax County to relocate the newspaper boxes, but they have not done so. It is their contract with the newspapers to do so. We do have plans to add additional speakers on the new extension at Burke.

Mike from Broad-Run asks:

1. Why did the trains have to stop at VanDorn. 2. Why did you not use the King Street/Alexandria Station. 3. There seem to be a lot of storage tracks in Alexandria. Is it possible to have an express train between Broad Run and Alexandria?

VRE Management:

The bridge construction was thousand feet south of Van Dorn. Train traffic was limited through the site. By agreement VRE agreed to stop all trains at Van Dorn and Franconia to reduce congestion during the day.

Hot on 329 from Manassas asks:

Hi Dale.. Cannot tell you how much I appreciate these monthly chats with you. It does show that you care. During the Meet the management at the L'Enfant I mentioned to management there that the AC was not working in the next to last car. It was fixed for about 2 weeks but then the cars eventually got warmer and warmer. The car is back to where it was when I mentioned it before. Could you please check to see of the freon has leaked out? Thank you for your time and caring

VRE Management:

I will check the car but please send in the specific car number to gotrains@vre.org.

Greg from Lorton VA asks:

What was the logic in having the trains hold short of the platform in Springfield yesterday while hundreds of passengers stood on the platform sweating profusely...all while an airconditioned/empty train idled 100 yards up the track?! Plus, all the messages/reminders/warnings stated the "departure" times for the trains, yet the train did not pull up to the platform until the "departure" time, then had to wait 10 minutes for the hundreds of passengers to load! This delay only compounded at each stop down to Fredricksburg... Come on VRE, use some common sense!!!

VRE Management:

Train crews can only be on duty so many hours because of federal regulations so they cannot show that early. While you were waiting on the platform, they were preparing the train for departure. Also, it took a little extra time than normal to get the train moving since the tracks they were stored on was not controlled by the dispatcher and so the crews have to talk to the dispatcher as they cross the switch on to the track next to the platform.

Greg from Lorton VA asks:

Another question about the service on June 1. You have a minimum number of trains running the entire day...why is it too much to ask to make sure all three trains are your most reliable and in the best condition?! Why must paying passengers have to deal with additional delays in the morning because of "equipment problems" and deal with no A/C and lights in the afternoon because of "equipment problems"??! Totally unacceptable in my mind. If you had to preposition a train set before the bridge construction, why not preposition good/reliable trains, and have maintenance crews check them?

VRE Management:

We did take this into account and even had two locomotives on each Fredericksburg train, because of the extra cars we added to each train. Unfortunately, the extra locomotive we put on 303 to run the air conditioner and lights on the long train malfunctioned. The locomotive pulling the train did not have enough power to run the A/C and lights due to the length.

William from Fredericksburg asks:

You no doubt remember the morning of May 6 on the Fred line. Just to let you know that there were no station announcements and the TV monitors weren't working. We were clueless as to what was going on.

VRE Management:

I apologize you did not hear any announcements. Our IT manager found the platform sign that faces south was not working properly that day but has since been fixed. I will make sure delay information is properly relayed. In the meantime, you may wish to sign up for Train Talk to get delay information, or talk to other passengers on the platform who can check their Train Talk accounts wirelessly.

Ray from Burke VA asks:

When VRE trains get to Union Station they proceed to the storage yards. Why can't two of the trains proceed to L'Enfant and park there for the day in keeping with your original plan? This would add the needed storage space preserving the plan to lengthen trains without hurting the Union Station patrons. (repeat unanswered question from last month) Call me determined to get a seat!

VRE Management:

The train movement that you are describing would cause operational problems within Washington Union terminal and neither railroad, neither Amtrak or CSX, would give us permission to do a counterflow movement. I will continue to look for options to increase capacity, and get you a seat.

Stan from Manassas, VA asks:

I noticed you collect ridership information on the various trains. Could you share that with the riders, so we could see what to do to avoid overcrowded trains?

VRE Management:

We update train ridership every month on our website. Look under the "About VRE" column and select "Performance Measures."

Stan from Manassas, VA asks:

Dale, can you comment on how negotiations with Manassas on more parking are going?

VRE Management:

We have spoken with Manassas and they are looking at various options. We will update you next month.

James from Gainesville, VA asks:

when/how VRE going to install better road sign to make the parking lot safer? I have asked the same question for over a year.

VRE Management:

I'll tackle this from two fronts. First VRE worked with VDOT last year to erect over 100 indicator signs to our stations to make it easier and safer to get there. With respect to putting signs in the parking lot to make it safer, it is more a function of behavior than putting up signage. We will continue to educate our riders on courteous driving while in our parking lots.

Jerry from Fredericksburg asks:

Have the new train crews taking over later this month been trained on the wheelchair lifts?

VRE Management:

The new crews will be trained on all VRE equipment.

Billy from Manassas Park asks:

Hi, I just wanted to compliment you on how everything went yesterday. I was worried that it was going to be a mess and thought about driving in, but everything went really smooth and all the staff were very helpful. Thanks for the great service every day! I love riding the train to work.

VRE Management:

Thank you for the compliments, I will relay to everyone involved.

Michelle from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Last month VRE received all the new passenger cars that were promised over a year ago. As an everyday 308 rider (old gallery cars) to hear that the new cars are going to be kept in the yard for swapping out other new cars when they need repair is very disappointing. The old cars are quick to warm up in the summer and slow to heat up in the winter. Why can't the old cars be held in the yard and put in use when needed and then we can ALL ride in the same comfort.

VRE Management:

We have 61 new cars but we have to operate a set of old equipment on each line because we do not have enough new equipment. I will try to move the equipment around so everyone has a chance to ride in the old car.

Mark from Brooke asks:

With "High" Speed Rail funds allocated to Powell's Creek - Arkendale track, will the Fredericksburg trains operate at a higher speed in this stretch of track once completed?

VRE Management:

You should not see a change in the overall speed, but should see a reduction in congestion and delays on the Fredericksburg Line with each new capital project.

Christiana from Manassas Park, VA asks:

Would you please ask people to be courteous and move to either side of the stairs or to the right so those of us who are pressed for time and/or have to catch buses or pick up kids from daycare on time, etc. can use the middle to speed through or go down the left side like metro and the airports. I see a lot of people walking very slowly and having conversations while the rest of us are trying to make it somewhere. Thanks!

VRE Management:

Please be mindful of the people around you. I would also like to remind those in a hurry to please be safe.

Brian from Haymarket, VA asks:

What's the bottom line about the future of the Haymarket/Gainesville extension? On another note, I think y'all did a pretty good job yesterday on the Manassas Line handling the service delay at Van Dorn.

VRE Management:

Environmental impact studies are currently being conducted. It will be at least four years until a station opens on the extension.

VONDA K from **WOODBIDGE VA** asks:

is train 306 going to be on time now that the bridge is finished?

VRE Management:

The third track project, which the bridge is a part of, will improve the capacity and performance all trains.

Tom from **Spotsy** asks:

I have a feeling that I will not be able to thank them personally, so I would like for you to pass on to the wonderful conductors that are leaving, my heart filled thanks. They were always there when I needed them. When I was having ticket problems, stumble on the stairs or having seating problems. They were a GREAT help.

VRE Management:

I will pass your comments on to Amtrak management. I know many of you have developed close relationship with the Amtrak crews over their 17 year run with VRE.

Dave from **Woodbridge, Va** asks:

When will the new Fredricksburg morning express train schedule be posted?

VRE Management:

Within the next two weeks.

Kim from **Manassas, VA** asks:

Hi,I usually take the afternoon Manassas line train and sit in the last car. I have noticed that there is a very foul smell when the train pulls up and I think its from the tank thats under the toilet. And I have seen gushing liquid coming from under the train, where I suppose this receptacle is located. Can this checked and rectified? Thanks.

VRE Management:

Please send in the specific car number into gotrains@vre.org and I will have the mechanical team look into it.

Stan from Manassas, VA asks:

Are there any regulations on parking scooters in VRE garages? Do they need a permit in Manassas, like cars do?

VRE Management:

They are considered a motorized vehicle and would have to abide by the same regulations as cars.

Doug from Burke, VA asks:

The media recently had many stories about VRE and it's preparedness for the 6/28 switchover to Keolis. One common elements seemed to be that VRE asked Amtrak to stay on a few weeks, and although Amtrak is willing, they may not. Will Amtrak be operating the trains for a transition period after 6/28?

VRE Management:

We anticipate that Keolis will operate all VRE service on June 28th.

Cassandra from Fairfax, VA asks:

I commend VRE for their spectacular organization during the planned service disruption yesterday. I rode the Manassas line, and I wasn't disappointed. Metro was quite crowded because of us, but the station managers waved us right in. The DASH buses were ready and waiting for us coming and going, and on the way home they came every 6-7 minutes, bringing people from the metro to the train yard. The train was already there and we were allowed to wait onboard until scheduled departure time in air-conditioned comfort. Kudos to VRE, and keep up the good work!

VRE Management:

Thanks for the compliment and thank you for riding.

Davin from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Is their track work going on North of Crystal to over the Potomac River? If not, why are trains going so slow in this area? I though track work in this area was finished

VRE Management:

There is no active work going on the area but potential speed restrictions impact the trains from time to time.

karen from richmond, va asks:

do you think the vre will come as far as richmond? or offer the step up tickets to richmond?
thanks.

VRE Management:

VRE has no immediate plans to extend service to Richmond, but never say never.

Tom- from **Wash, DC** asks:

When will the new express train schedule be published?

VRE Management:

Once the railroads approve the schedule, we will publish it. We hope within the next two weeks.

Jay from **Bristow VA** asks:

I have received two parking tickets at Manassas station, because of the garage and lot running out of space. I am hesitant to pay these tickets as providing no parking for their commuting taxpaying residents is the county's issue, and I should not be penalized for their poor planning!! Any suggestions? Also, any progress on expanding parking? I'm already driving to Manassas from Bristow despite being closer to Broad Run because of the lack of parking at the Broad Run station. Should I now travel all the way to Manassas Park? Thanks!

VRE Management:

Manassas Park is not any better. I am working with the City of Manassas to find more parking for VRE riders. Studies are currently being done to assess the best solution for expanding parking at Broad Run, whether it be more surface parking or a garage.

D. from **Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

Why are there no protocols in place for machine failures for cash/voucher customers? For that matter, why do agents not have backup machines? Last night, the Union Station ticket agent was unable to sell me a step-up ticket to the 7PM Amtrak since the machine was down. He had no backup procedure, and sent me to Amtrak's ticket counter, who could not help. Amtrak's customer service refused to let me but a ticket on board, and I ended up stranded until a nearly 11pm pickup at Springfield Metro. This is not the first incident, only the most serious.

VRE Management:

A Step-Up ticket could have been purchased at a VRE vending machine. As a last resort, tell the conductor prior to boarding the train about your issue, he could work out an arrangement with you.

Nick from **Tidioute** asks:

How much does it cost VRE when WMATA opens the Metro Option for VRE riders? Is this something that VRE budgets for each year?

VRE Management:

They bill us the average commute per commuter that day. We do budget for service disruption related items and it is worth what we pay to WMATA to help stranded passengers.

Carole from **Burke, VA** asks:

Will VRE have a role in setting up shuttle buses or planning the schedule for shuttle buses that I understand are contemplated to shuttle Metro and VRE passengers to and from the King Street Metro/VRE station and the large government office facility that is currently under construction off of Route 395 at Seminary Road? Would VRE support the shuttle bus service or offer suggestions on the timing of shuttles so that current VRE passengers can continue riding VRE if they are transferred to the new office facility (which is not accessible by Metro)? thank you, Carole

VRE Management:

VRE has been contacted about the City of Alexandria about the movement of our passengers to the new BRAC facility. We continue to work with the City to make every effort possible for a smooth transition for our riders.

Fletcher Reede from **Broad Run** asks:

1. What are the chances that Fauquier County will join the VRE? 2. Would you like to see Fauquier County join the VRE?

VRE Management:

There is the possibility for upcoming meetings with county officials.

Brad from **Manassas Park** asks:

Just a quick comment on yesterday's "service disruption." What disruption? We went to a new stop. That's it !! VRE did an outstanding job in coordinating this. WELL DONE !!

VRE Management:

Thank you, I am glad to hear it didn't affect you much. Technically though, we did not run any trains into Alexandria or north, which is a disruption in service.

Liz from Stafford, Va asks:

Will the upgrades to the Brooke parking lot include the addition of another entrance/exit onto Brooke Rd?

VRE Management:

No, but we will add a right turn lane.

Chris from Bristow, VA asks:

Are there any plans to improve the Piper Lane/Noakesville Road (Highway 28) intersection? One or two more left turn lanes are needed. It typically takes 15 minutes to get to Highway 28 due to a long queue of traffic. People are literally running from the train to be the first to get to their car to avoid this delay. This intersection should be improved before more capacity is added with a parking garage.

VRE Management:

We have approached VDOT about improving the situation at Piper Lane and Highway 28. With the budget crunch, they do not have any funds to add turn lanes. They have tweaked the light several times, but cannot add any more time since that will impede traffic flow too much on 28 and would eventually jam up Prince William County Parkway as well.

Bob from Manassas, Va asks:

Now that the first round of "MOU projects" is nearly complete (great job - hurray!), any idea of what's in store for the next round? Like, could an express train (for either line) be added if a fourth track is added between Alexandria and the Potomac River?

VRE Management:

We're going to build 11 miles of third track from Cherry Hill to Arkendale. We are looking at building an access tunnel from Alexandria VRE station to King Street Metro and building a third track from Spotsylvania to Fredericksburg.

Aaron from Manassas Park asks:

A couple of suggestions/questions... 1) I love getting service updates on my phone via Twitter. Any chance you could set up a separate Twitter feed for Man and Fred lines? While I feel for Fred line riders during delays, it's really nothing I need to know about. 2) Would it be possible to post the "Life on the Train" messages on the VRE web site? I actually find those quite entertaining.

VRE Management:

I will look into both your suggestions.

Steve from Spotsylvania asks:

Are the electronic signs on the outside of the new gallery cars limited to "Broad Run," "Fredericksburg," and "Union Station"? Yesterday train 308 to Franconia-Springfield carried "Union Station" destination signs.

VRE Management:

They are not limited to those destinations and we will look into modifying them if we have another similarly planned service disruption.

Alan from Burke asks:

I'm not sure if this problem has been raised recently, but the TVs on the platforms remain a wasted resource. Last week in Burke, the TVs were black three days last week. The delay messages are not real time and are very vague. It would be great if the TVs turned into a "value-added" tool.

VRE Management:

The platform screens were added for us to be ADA compliant. We have looked into adding additional information on the information screens but it requires more funding that we do not have at this time. Keep in mind that they do not display information at all times, only when trains are coming and when there are delays. We also display "Did You Know" messages occasionally. I will tell our IT manager to make sure the screens at Burke are working properly.

Just Happy from Frederickburg asks:

Is there any communication on going in regards to raising rates?

VRE Management:

There are no plans to raise the fares next fiscal year.

Marie from Manassas Park asks:

According to the posted Performance Measures, all but 2 of the outlying Manassas Line parking areas are filled to 100% or more. What plans are there to alleviate this?

VRE Management:

Prince William County has provided funding to expand surface parking. In addition, we have provided funding to begin the process of building a deck at Broad Run. Currently no plans of building new parking at Manassas, Manassas Park, and Rolling Road.

Jay from Burke, VA asks:

What is the likelihood of establishing an interface between the Metro Smartrip and VRE?

VRE Management:

There are plans for VRE to be on the regional card for transit agencies but it has been increasingly difficult to make our fare collection systems compatible. We are still working with WMATA to find a solution.

Jame from Manassas asks:

I would like to suggest that VRE build a storage rail at Crystal City. This would allow you to. 1. Free room in DC 2. Have a express train that runs between Broad-Run and Crystal City (for those of us want to get to work early. 3. Add a early 1430 train going home. (departs from Crystal City) 4. Prevent delays when trains cant get out of DC. I think it could also have other uses. What do you think?

VRE Management:

Those are all great ideas and we would love to do them, however, money is an issue. We will continue to work to improve service towards goals such as the ones you mentioned with what we have.

Lauren F. from Burke, VA asks:

Can you give us an update on the Keolis handover? I have been hearing some disturbing rumors...will we all be driving or taking the bus on Jun 28?

VRE Management:

I can assure you VRE will still operate normal service on June 28th.

Mark from New Baltimore asks:

If the requirements for Fauquier to join the VRE are only to have 2% gas tax and pay a % for it residents use, why must the PTRC feel it needs to add so many other requirements. Through out my career as a soldier, I was always told to Keep it Simple Stupid (KISS). Well if VRE need more money, that is one way to get it. By having Fauquier as member; it open up a lot of options for expansion; it creates more revenue; and it just an all around good idea to have Fauquier County as member. You might even get Culpepper County to join. Please dont hold back. Tell us what you think.

VRE Management:

I think the more jurisdictions that want VRE service is great. However, it is up to those

jurisdictions to make the commitment and join. The citizens have to tell their elected officials what they want.

Tom from Spotsy asks:

Any progress on getting a crosswalk at the Fredericksburg Station from the Elevator to cross Caroline Street to get to the FRED stop?

VRE Management:

We'll have the City look into it.

Mike from Fredericksburg asks:

IS the express train on schedule to start in July ?

VRE Management:

Yes, just finalizing the schedule.

Jeff from Manassas asks:

I regularly ride trains 327 and 329 in the afternoon. Do you currently have any plans to alleviate the crowded conditions on these trains?

VRE Management:

We have plans, but we need to find more storage space for the trains in the middle of the day. We are probably a few years away before we can add more capacity to the system (after we add an express train to the Fredericksburg Line in July).

Joseph from Manassas Park, VA asks:

Will an "overpass" type of entrance / exit ever be added to the Manassas Park station, especially with City Center? Having to cross the tracks is VERY dangerous there when the gates don't go down and opposing train traffic on the other rail.

VRE Management:

You shouldn't ever cross the tracks at unauthorized points. Not only is it trespassing, like you mention, it is dangerous. For now, Manassas Park riders who use that lot have to take the long way around to get to the platform. Please do not use any unauthorized shortcuts.

Jodie from Burke, VA asks:

Have you ever considered adding a Frequently Asked Questions area to the VRE website? That way, many of the repeat questions could be moved there, and there would be more time to answer other questions on the online forums?

VRE Management:

We do have a FAQ on our website, however some people elect not to read it. I am happy to have this interactive session with veteran and new riders alike.

VRE Management:

Wraps up another session. Have a great summer and we'll see you after the 4th of July fireworks on the 7th.

-Dale
