

## Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, March 10th at 12:00pm.



There are currently 59 questions waiting to be answered.

### **VRE Management:**

Welcome back to another exciting hour of the VRE On-Line Forum. As many of you know I have extended the public comment period on our proposed changes and will be having a series of public hearings starting tonight in Fredericksburg. If you have an opinion about the proposed service changes, please make a comment. We are looking at all of them. The plan is to make a recommendation to the VRE Operations Board on April 16th. On to the questions!

---

### **Judy from Springfield, VA asks:**

You are raising my fare \$84/mo to cover a possible use of metro? This sounds like a scam and I don't appreciate the huge jump.

### **VRE Management:**

The TLC, Transit Link Card, is a monthly VRE ticket combined with unlimited Metrorail fare for the same month. Previously, the Metro fare portion of the ticket cost \$80. With Metro's fare increase, it is now \$84. This is the only VRE ticket that is going up in price.

---

### **Kevin from FB asks:**

Aren't new gallery cars supposed to be available soon? When will we start seeing them in use? Any idea which consists will remain older gallery cars and which will be replaced with the newer ones?

### **VRE Management:**

The new cars are on Fredericksburg Trains 304/301/309. The older cars will remain on Fredericksburg 308/311 and Manassas 326/325/336/329.

---

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

There is a pot hole on Express Way in the left turn lane into the Woodbridge station and another one in front of the garage. Can you please have VDOT fix them?

**VRE Management:**

I'll look into it.

---

**Tim from Spotsy “No longer a mooch!” asks:**

If there is room please have the CEO remind the FBG riders not to congregate around the entrances to the ticketing area at the FBG Station. It can be difficult and sometimes dangerous when there is a logjam of people having to maneuver around people hovering by the entrance just to validate tickets in the morning.

**VRE Management:**

A courtesy reminder from a fellow rider from a new member jurisdiction.

---

**Mike from Dumfries, VA asks:**

What is with all these CSX speed restrictions lately? CSX is issuing them too much causing us to be delayed. I see Amtrak, Metro trains and highway traffic going faster than us.

**VRE Management:**

Since you mentioned Metro trains I assume you are referring to the area between Alexandria and Franconia/Springfield. CSX is constructing a third track and all trains have to go slower in this area because of the people working around the tracks.

---

**S. from Manassas, VA asks:**

Will VRE provide shuttle buses to the L'Enfant Plaza platform since they are planning to discontinue the PM departure train from Union Station (I believe it's the 329 (4:25) train).

**VRE Management:**

No VRE will not provide shuttle buses to L'Enfant. As people will be able to take the preceding train to the station. For example, those wishing to take Manassas Line Train #333 from Union Station would board Fredericksburg Line #309 which departs Union Station at 5:15p. Then you would detrain at L'Enfant and Manassas Line #333 would depart shortly after that.

---

**PJD from Crystal City, VA asks:**

Can you give an update on where things stand as far as a Spotsylvania station, i.e., location, how long before construction starts, what zone it will be located in, etc.? What steps are there before we see a station?

**VRE Management:**

Currently there is a committee looking at site locations for a potential Spotsylvania station. Once

a determination is made, we will have to make changes to the railroad as well as construct the station. I think we are looking 3-4 years before a station is open.

---

**Todd from Fredericksburg VA** asks:

DO you ever ride the train as a commuter (so no one knows who you are) to personally see what is working and to identify areas for improved customer service and equipment operation?

**VRE Management:**

I often ride the Manassas Line to work, but all the conductors know me so it's a little hard to be incognito. Roughly a third of the VRE staff uses the train to commute to work. When they notice issues they bring them to my attention.

---

**Roxann from Bristow, VA** asks:

We have a parking crisis at the Broad Run station and some kind of solution is needed. There are practically NO parking spaces available after 6:30 am. This means that if you do not take the 6:40 train, you are out of luck for the VRE trains leaving at 7:20 or 7:50. I would imagine that ridership for those trains is nearly non-existent. What can be done?

**VRE Management:**

Prince William is providing us \$2.4 million to study alternatives and begin the design phase for parking expansion. The study will both look at surface expansion as well as a deck. In the short term, we are trying to increase the parking by 100-200 spaces quickly if we can find some local money to do the construction. Prince William and VRE are concerned about the situation and looking to mitigate it in 6 months.

---

**Jesse from Manassas** asks:

According to insidenova.com on March 7, "Late last month, VRE announced a \$2.4 million study that will examine the possibility of doing what's been done in the past—acquiring more land to expand the surface parking lot at Broad Run, this time at an estimated \$5 million." 2.4 million for just a study? really?

**VRE Management:**

The \$2.4 million will be used to determine alternatives, perform the environmental analysis, and do the preliminary engineering on the preferred alternative.

---

**Allison from Burke, VA** asks:

How often do you revise the published times? The reason I ask is because the times for my trains

seem to be a bit off. Train 322 seems to be consistently about 10 minutes early arriving to Union Station, whereas train 324 is consistently a little bit late or barely on time.

**VRE Management:**

We usually update the schedules once or twice a year. Currently, we want to wait to see what happens with our proposed service changes before we make any other changes.

---

**William from Fredericksburg asks:**

Last month some trains were delayed because of drag detector problems. What is that? Your train dictionary is useful but needs expanding.

**VRE Management:**

A drag detector, also known as a defect detector, is a safety device that sits along the track and monitors passing trains for defects such as hot wheels or items that may be dragging from the train. Every time a train passes it will send a radio message to the conductor stating whether there are problems or not. When they detect something amiss the train must be stopped and inspected.

---

**Wayne from Alexandria VA asks:**

Why is the conductor so concerned about everyone being seated before train 327 leaves Manassas Park and Manassas in the evening. They don't seem to be concerned that people have to stand from Alexandria to Burke Center.

**VRE Management:**

I have asked the conductors on train 327 to help with the queuing issues that we see complaints about. Many Manassas riders have emailed us indicating that they have trouble getting off because of the Broad Run riders queuing up ahead of time.

---

**Linda from Manassas asks:**

As a rider who tries to get off the train in Manassas, and I stress the word "tries"...I appreciate the current attempt to get folks to sit if they are not detraining in Manassas Park or Manassas. After watching the recent news story on Broad Run, while I feel your pain related to parking, please feel mine on trying to get off the train without having to stand the entire way from MP or having to step over folks who are waiting for Broad Run. One additional note, to the guy in the white truck (and a few others) stop the race to the exit of the Manassas parking garage before you kill someone.

**VRE Management:**

Wayne, these are the type of complaints that we are seeing frequently.

---

**John** from **Burke, VA** asks:

I've already submitted my comments in writing on the proposed schedule changes. Is there any value in attending one of the public hearings as well?

**VRE Management:**

Based on the comments that we have received so far. I plan on discussing three possible options at our public hearings. Feel free to come to a public hearing. I would love to get all the feedback I can get.

---

**David** from **Manassas, VA** asks:

Your proposed change to the 330 train will affect a lot of people. Are you aware of how many people are expecting to be able to get off at Union Station, who will have to find an alternative route to get to work? I take the 330 in the morning and **MUST** get to Union Station to have a chance on getting to work on time. Taking the metro on the Red Line means I can just make it. By getting off at L'Enfant, I either have to stand out on the platform and wait for the next Fredericksburg train or take the metro and make a connection from the Green Line. Either one gets me in too late.

**VRE Management:**

Thanks for the comment. Hope you submitted your comment through the public comment forum so it can be recorded.

---

**Jason** from **Gainesville, VA** asks:

Any chance you can push for some motorcycle parking along the Manassas line? The Fredericksburg line apparently has some, and I think it might help with the parking problems we've been experiencing.

**VRE Management:**

We'll look into it.

---

**Gypped** from **Fredericksburg** asks:

Are there any plans to compensate monthly ticket holders for the days the VRE did not run because of the snow?

**VRE Management:**

I understand there are monthly ticket holders who feel they lost out when the snowstorms cancelled train service. The monthly ticket breakeven point is 14 days and we operated 15 days in February.

---

**Marvin from Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

Express Train - Have heard the departure time from Fredericksburg 5:05 AM. NO mention of arrival time at Alexandria, No mention of Fares. Recommend first stop at Franconia/Springfield because of parking, metro/bus access, etc., possibly eliminate King St as a stop. Any comments? Thanks

**VRE Management:**

We haven't published arrival times yet. Fares have not changed and right now we will not stop at Franconia/Springfield because Alexandria has far more riders. However, we are still looking at all comments and will continue to the end of the month.

---

**John from Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

When you add 2 cars to Train #307, do you plan to add the new locomotive to it as well? Also, how can you add more cars when you don't have any more new cars. We can't put the old cars in service as they are too old and no good

**VRE Management:**

One of the options we are looking at is to add two cars to Train 307 and make it a 10 car set. However, we cannot do that until the new locomotives arrive because we need the additional horsepower to do it. It can possibly be implemented in the December 2010 timeframe.

---

**BroadRunner from Manassas VA** asks:

Are there any plans to start a train service that departs around 1430 from DC? It seems there is a wide gap between the 1315pm train and the 1545 train to Manassas..I think it would benefit more folks to leave around that time versus 1315..thanks

**VRE Management:**

There are no plans to add train service in the 2:30pm timeframe. Part of the reason is that we need to work around already scheduled Amtrak trains and they currently have a train that leaves in the 2:30pm timeframe.

---

**Rick from Manassas, Va** asks:

It seems like VRE is trying to pull a fast one with the express train. VRE is avoiding daily storage fees (\$6,000 a day) associated with storing their train in Amtraks storage yard. Now they are going to store the trains near L'efant to save money. VRE is going to give the appearance that they are upgrading service, but this is not the case. Good job on terminating relations with Amtrak.

**VRE Management:**

We are not avoiding storage fees. There is unfortunately, no room left at the end. The only way to expand our service or lengthen trains is to utilize the L'Enfant storage track.

---

**Beth from VA asks:**

To date, how many public comments have been received on the proposed changes to service, in particular regarding terminating Manassas line train 330 at L'Enfant and originating Manassas line train 333 at L'Enfant? Of comments received, how many: - support Manassas Line train 330 terminating at L'Enfant? - oppose Manassas Line train 330 terminating at L'Enfant? - support Manassas Line train 333 originating at L'Enfant? - oppose Manassas Line train 333 originating at L'Enfant? Is any other option being seriously considered by VRE? If so, is this shared with the public?

**VRE Management:**

To date we have received 350 comments and growing. Quick summary would be 145 are not happy with the proposed change at L'Enfant. 20 are happy with the changes. 79 expressed positive comments to all changes and 48 expressed negative comments to all proposed changes. Please continue to submit your comments. We are looking at other options which include potentially no changes, an express train only into L'Enfant and other combinations based on the comments you are submitting. Hopefully I will hear additional comments tonight in Fredericksburg.

---

**Clator from Rippon to Alexandria asks:**

VRE does not seem to be moving fast enough to meet the significant increase in ridership over the past 18 months. Gas prices are on the rise again, and more and more trains are standing room only from Crystal City to Quantico. VRE needs to be more aggressive about increasing capacity both in terms of cars and in frequency of service. Since parking the trains is the biggest problem, has VRE done recent studies to determine if more circular service can be added? Such as trains coming back out of DC in the morning and mid-day trains coming in?

**VRE Management:**

VRE faces a number of challenges. Parking for our trainsets is one, which is the whole basis for the proposed service changes. Unfortunately, providing some sort of circular service is not possible as we share the tracks with our host railroads who operate their freight train when VRE is not in service.

---

**Danester from Gainesville VA asks:**

Is there a current status to the Broad Run extension project, or is it mothballed?

**VRE Management:**

We will shortly start the environmental process and the preliminary engineering for the Gainesville/Haymarket extension project.

---

**John from Manassas, VA asks:**

Why is a parking garage at Broad Run even being considered? A parking garage at Broad Run will just encourage more sprawl and traffic. It will sit empty on weekends. No economic development is planned around the station. I would recommend putting a parking garage at the new Gainesville station, another parking garage in old town Manassas or Manassas Park before even considering Broad Run.

**VRE Management:**

At this point, if we can find funds for design and construction in a timely manner, a parking deck at Broad Run would open before the Gainesville/Haymarket extension. We have to address the parking issues at Broad Run ASAP.

---

**Concerned from Alexandria, VA asks:**

Last month, I pushed the emergency button on the train and was disappointed to see how long it took for someone to respond. Could you please describe what the emergency procedures are when the button is pushed so that I will know whether appropriate procedures were followed?  
Thanks

**VRE Management:**

I think my answer will be too detailed and lengthy for the space I have to answer here in the forum. Please email Jeremy at [gotrains@vre.org](mailto:gotrains@vre.org) so he can more fully address your concerns.

---

**Roy from Bristow, VA asks:**

Since it appears that Amtrak cannot be persuaded to decrease the StepUp ticket price, would it be possible for you to suggest they offer a discounted package, say 5 tickets for the price of 4? They would sell more at a discounted rate, plus overcrowding on VRE afternoon trains might also be alleviated.

**VRE Management:**

I am still pursuing this and will update you when a final decision is made. Thanks for the suggestion.

---

**Lin from Fredericksburg, VA asks:**

Why are the trains always so cold?

**VRE Management:**

We set the thermostat to 68-72 degrees. However, we have blowers that are constantly introducing fresh air into the car so the air doesn't get stale. It's similar to a wind-chill factor and you may find sitting on the lower level does not experience this as much as the upper level. And we are testing some cars to operate with a higher temp and see how that goes with the riders.

---

**Tim from Burke, VA asks:**

Union Station has new signs stating the train waiting areas are for AMTRAK/MARC only. Is this further harassment due to the the new Vendor? Is AMTRAK actually going to throw VRE people out while waiting for trains? Obviously VRE pays to use US, so why do we as passengers and innocent passengers at that in the vendor selection process, get treated as less than acceptable?

**VRE Management:**

I don't think there was any intended harassment to VRE passengers. But we will take at the signs at Union Station and suggest any possible changes to Amtrak.

---

**SD from Brooke, VA asks:**

I noticed that Quiet car is trademark of Amtrak. Since you are moving to different operator in July, Keolis, Is Quiet car going to be available in all VRE trains when operating under new service? Second, when the track construction between Franconia and Alexandria will be over? Does new tracks will allow you to move trains faster than its' current speed?

**VRE Management:**

We are permitted to use Amtrak trademark of the Quiet car. This will not change when Keolis begins operating the trains. Secondly, when the track construction is completed, VRE will not operate faster, but there will be more capacity which will allow us to move around slower moving freight trains.

---

**Chris from Springfield, VA asks:**

DC had received money to replace a bridge in the district that VRE and Amtrak trains use. Does VRE know when the project will be done and if will cause delays?

**VRE Management:**

DC received funding to analyze the replacement of the Long Bridge or an additional bridge over the Potomac to increase railroad capacity. The funding will not pay for construction of a new bridge, it is the beginning of the study to see what the alternatives are to increase the capacity of the railroad over the Potomac. VRE will participate in this study.

---

**Nathan from Ladysmith** asks:

Is there a possibility in adding a evening express train to complement the morning express train that is currently being planned?

**VRE Management:**

We do not have any more storage track to house an additional train. Currently we “deadhead” (non-revenue) a train back to DC after Train #301 completes its southbound run. It then operates again as train 309. We would like to eliminate this deadhead train and add a trainset that would run as the proposed express train and 301 eliminating the need for the deadhead.

---

**Michael from Hume, VA** asks:

V722 has been mighty hot this week - will this be fixed soon?

**VRE Management:**

Our Director of Rail Equipment has been notified and is on it.

---

**Linda from Fredericksburg VA** asks:

What are you doing, in conjunction with CSX and Amtrak, to improve train timeliness? I am using leave on a regular basis because the train is late at least once a week, if not more. I pay the same ticket price rather I get to work on time or not. Also, can the VRE conductors improve their ticket checking? I ride 308 and 311, and very rarely see a ticket check.

**VRE Management:**

CSX has made many track improvements over the years, i.e. new switches, Quantico bridge, building a third rail, and is continuing to do such projects to improve the flow of the railroad. Our on-time performance has improved drastically over the last year as a result and will continue to improve with more upgrades. I will work Amtrak about the ticket checks.

---

**Steve from Burke, Va** asks:

In follow up to a question at an earlier chat, any follow up with Fairfax Co. about the traffic flow in the Burke Centre parking garage? The biggest problem seems to be the folks who park on the first floor and drive against the one-way directional to get to the exit. This causes an extreme back up. Do you know if train #329 will again get some of the newer cars. It been set as the older coaches for months. Also, can you confirm when VRE expects its next rate adjustment?

**VRE Management:**

I will let Fairfax County know again about the garage. They have had police there in the past. About the older cars, they will remain on 329. Finally, there will be no fare increase this year.

---

**whitney** from **Woodbridge** asks:

Please post this, this morning in the Woodbridge garage where parking is already tight. I see numerous cars double parking. This is rude and unnecessary. Thanks

**VRE Management:**

Woodbridge riders, please don't double park.

---

**Tom** from **Spotsy** asks:

A few months back: Frank from Fredericksburg, VA asks: A marked pedestrian crosswalk is needed to aid train riders in safely crossing to and from the FRED Bus Stop on Caroline Street at the train station. Currently, riders are actually forced to "jay walk" to make the crossing. There have been several near miss accidents involving unsuspecting motorists and passengers moving between the FRED Bus Stop and the train station. A marked cross walk would alert motorists and require riders to cross in the designated location. Additionally, brighter street lighting at the crossing would also lend to a safer crossing. VRE Management: The better answer is to change the stair configuration so that people can go directly from street to the parking lot. We have designed stairs and waiting for the permits from the City of Fredericksburg. Once we have the permits, the stairs will be installed. For persons who has trouble with stairs; I see that the stairs are in the process of being constructed, but that does not help the folks who have trouble with stairs and need to use the elevator! There still needs to be a cross walk for them to cross Caroline Street!

**VRE Management:**

Good point. I will pass that suggestion on to the City of Fredericksburg.

---

**Tom** from **Spotsy** asks:

A long time ago, it was said that CSX has to money to do repairs to the Fredericksburg station. Over the six years that I have been using that station, I have not seen any repairs! They gave the exposed metal a coat of paint and that was it. The windows have not had the glass replaced. The concrete is cracked and falling off, all over the place. If something is not done, it will soon be a safety hazard!

**VRE Management:**

Improvements to the Fredericksburg station should be started sometime this year.

---

**Tom** from **Spotsy** asks:

I feel that you folks should have a sit down talk with the FRED folks. Just because the VRE trains are running is not a good enough reason for the FRED VRE Feeder buses to run! It has

happened twice now where the VRE was operating and FRED VRE Feeder service was not. I feel that I had paid for a ride on those days!

**VRE Management:**

While we try to complement each other's services, ultimately FRED management makes that decision. They factor in whether we run against the safety of their operation.

---

**Tom from Spotsy asks:**

Why does this forum always revert to the top of the page each time a new question and answer is posted? It drives me cRaZy to scroll down after each posting trying to find the place where my reading was interrupted!

**VRE Management:**

It can be annoying. I find hitting the refresh button will refresh the page and leave you in the same place you were before.

---

**Jim from Gainesville asks:**

In assessing the comments on your proposed schedule changes, I hope that you will consider the fact that people who perceive that they will lose something directly (e.g., the 330 riders to Union Station) are far more likely to comment than the many other riders who don't see themselves as affected (since the link between addressing storage issues and addressing crowding issues by adding cars is more indirect). I would hope that the decision would not simply be based on tallying up the number of comments received for and against the proposal.

**VRE Management:**

Your point is well taken. We read every comment because perception that people have does really depend on where they sit in this situation. We have had many positive comments because it will add cars to their trains but they do not understand that some trains will terminate or originate at L'Enfant.

---

**Linda from Woodbridge, VA asks:**

VRE rates, effective April. Has the new pricing schedule been made? There's a booklet version, which is usually sacked in a pocket shelf on the trains. Are they updated?

**VRE Management:**

Only the TLC ticket is increasing. The cost of these tickets are on our website and are only going up \$4 over the current fare.

---

**GS from Manassas** asks:

With all the discussion about the storage at L'Enfant, has anyone thought about another 9/11 and no way home unless trains are stored AWAY from Union Station and the tunnel?

**VRE Management:**

This is definitely one of our considerations. During 9/11, we were not allowed to move any of our trains out of Union Station until the 1st street tunnel was inspected. Having two trains stored at L'Enfant will greatly speed up our response should a similiar situation occur.

---

**AJ from Richmond, VA** asks:

I read a little about the express train you plan to add. I think this is a GREAT addition to your service. Since I have lived in NYC the "express" train concept is not new to me and I feel its something southern state commuter rails could benefit from. I'm interested to know if you plan to add more than one express train option to Fredericksburg line? Thanks.

**VRE Management:**

At this time, we do not plan more than this one express train. We do not own our own tracks and coordinating our trains with the freight trains and other Amtrak trains makes scheduling more express trains difficult.

---

**Douglas from Burke Va** asks:

Is Keolis meeting their targets for hiring train crew? How many of the current Amtrak crew will switch to Keolis, and stay on VRE trains?

**VRE Management:**

They are confident they will be able to staff our trains when they take over the contract. I do not have any current numbers.

---

**Norm from Cheers, Boston, Massachusetts** asks:

If you have no plans to construct a north platform entrance at Lorton, could you at least block off the path? People were still using during the snow and I've seen several near collisions from people running to catch the train almost hitting people trying to climb up the incline. There's also the railroad ties lying on the side with rebarb sticking out. You have a nice liability problem there.

**VRE Management:**

Hey Norm, did you move to Lorton to avoid your tab? Bartenders around here might still know your name, though. But seriously, I will work with our Manager of Safety and Security on this situation.

---

**Lynwood from Woodbridge, Va** asks:

Will there be trains added for the Fredericksburg line

**VRE Management:**

We are proposing to add an early morning express train this summer. Please visit our website at <http://www.vre.org/service/comment.html> for all the details.

---

**Tom from Spotsy** asks:

Timely Announcements: When a train will be arriving on the opposite track, there needs to be more frequent announcements. Last month when 302 used the opposite track at the Fredericksburg Station, I was on the wrong side and did not realize it. By the time I was able to get back to the elevator, ride it down, hobble over to the other side and ride the other elevator up, the train had pulled out of the station! I never heard an announcement about train 302! There was an announcement or two about train 304 prior to its arrival. But still the announcements were not frequent enough

**VRE Management:**

I apologize for that. I will make sure frequent announcements are made if the train comes on the opposite track.

---

**R. from Woodbridge, VA** asks:

Any thoughts as to why VRE tickets are so expensive on a per-mile basis? I have ridden Rail Runner (NM), LIRR, and NJ Transit in the last few months, and all three seem like a bargain compared to VRE.

**VRE Management:**

Every commuter rail is funded differently. I can't speak as to what the funding situations are at those particular agencies. I can say that VRE fares have to cover 50% of our operating costs.

---

**Jan from Lake Anna, Virginia** asks:

As an active supporter of the VRE, and Hi-Speed trains, I am very disappointed to hear about the proposed reduced service. With Spots. County just joining and other counties considering joining, the last thing voters want to hear is the prospect of less service when considering the pros and cons of the VRE. At the present time, riders are commuting in excess of 1.25 hours on each line, and to add to the cost of commuting on the VRE (time and money for Metro) is very disturbing. So, I ask is it space or cost of space, that is driving VRE to reduced service to riders? Thanks.

**VRE Management:**

The bottom line is that we are out of storage space at our mid-day storage yard and there is simply no available land to expand.

---

**Meredith** from **Lorton, VA** asks:

Can you update Twitter more frequently when trains are late, please?

**VRE Management:**

It is updated every time we send out a Train Talk delay message.

---

**Jennifer** from **Manassas** asks:

Are you dating Tom from Spogy? Yoe seem to be answering all his questions!

**VRE Management:**

What can I say? He submitted a lot of great questions.

---

**Aaron** from **Manassas Park** asks:

This isn't a question as much as a comment. Feel free to put it in the forum or not. I understand people who have legitimate complaints and questions, but it seems like you guys take quite a beating from people who just want to complain. Accusing you of pulling a fast one or ripping people off. It's ridiculous! I love riding VRE. While there are things that could be fixed, I've always had a great experience with VRE and I don't know how I would get to work without you!

**VRE Management:**

Thank you for your kind words. It's always nice to end things on a positive note.

---

**VRE Management:**

Another great hour. I'm looking forward to meeting some of you in Fredericksburg this evening. If you don't live in the Fredericksburg area, we have several other public hearings planned. Please visit our website.

Our next On-Line Forum will be Wednesday, April 14.

-Dale

---