

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, May 5th at 12:00pm.



There are currently 33 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Hola! Feliz Cinco de Mayo! There's a lot going on and you all have asked a lot of great questions so let's get started.

Mark from Spotsylvania, VA asks:

When will the schedules be published to include the morning express service? What is the estimated timeframe for the VRE passenger service from the new Spotsylvania station? Will the morning express' first stop be at the Spotsylvania station when it is opened? Keep up the good work!!! It's great riding the VRE!!!

VRE Management:

Thanks for the compliments! Once we work out the details for the express train, we will publish its schedule. I am hoping in a few years, a station will open in Spotsylvania and assume the train will stop there since a lot of riders would migrate from Fredericksburg to a new station further south.

Kelly from Manassas, VA asks:

Why is train 329 going to continue to be stuck with the old prison cars? The train is almost always standing room only by the time it gets to Crystal City, the seats in the old cars are really uncomfortable (no headrests), they smell funny and the windows are a strange shade of green. There's only one new car in the whole set at the back. Train 331 is all new cars. Why not put a few more new cars on 329 and a few old cars on 331. It's seems like the 4:25pm riders are being punished.

VRE Management:

Since it is difficult to combine older Gallery cars with the newer ones, we usually keep a train consist, well consistent. Announcements might not be relayed and all the doors might not open with different cars. The reason for the one new car on the end is because it is the cab car, which is where the engineer works in when the train is travelling in that direction. Once we start getting the new locomotives we will look at possibly rotating the older Gallery cars among different

trains. Also, the older cars have more seats than the newer ones and specifically put it on certain trains to address crowding.

Dawn Elizabeth from **Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

With the onslaught of tourists and families using the train into the trip, would it be possible to have a family car similar to the quiet car? People don't necessarily have to have families, but for those of us who would like to bring our kids on the train for a day excursion, it would be nice to know that we should go to the last car or such with the understanding that if my kids talk we won't be bothering other riders and the kids can also enjoy ride without me constantly shushing them.

VRE Management:

We have had many suggestions about starting various kinds of special interest cars. I don't know if any of them are feasible at this time without additional cars.

David from **Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

Is there anything that VRE can do jointly with CSX to minimize the delays caused by CSX track workers failing to respond to radio calls?

VRE Management:

We always review when delays happen and work with the host railroads if we start to see a pattern. In this case, this type of delay doesn't happen often when it does, it is not a long delay. The foreman is usually dealing with something critical at the moment.

Sarah from **Haymarket, VA** asks:

When the new contractor takes over for Amtrak, will the transition affect routes operated by VRE conductors? In other words, if my usual conductor wears a VRE uniform (as opposed to an Amtrak uniform), will he still be operating my routes after the switch?

VRE Management:

Keolis made offers to the current conductors and engineers. As of now, only one of those have decided to join the Keolis team, however, the new train crews will be qualified and will give you the same good service you have come to expect on VRE.

Paul from **Stafford, VA** asks:

Have you given anymore thought to allowing discounted tickets for Seniors to be purchased at Quantico, Woodbridge, or other vendors beyond Springfield? It has always been my experience that if people know the rules, they will generally abide by them.

VRE Management:

We are in fact meeting about this tomorrow. Hopefully we will have more news for you later this month.

Agness from Manassas, VA asks:

I ride the over crowded train # 329, but for some reason we always have to wait between Manassas Park and Manassas for the EMPTY Northbound train to come threw. EMPTY train verses full train?? Hmmm, what's wrong with this picture??

VRE Management:

Timing is everything and in the case of 329 vs the return train, it's always a tight squeeze. I'll keep a better eye on it and make adjustments where I can.

TJ from Springfield asks:

Have you ever considered starting a car-pool list on your website? It would be nice to find other riders in our neighborhoods that we could ride with to and from the station, thus saving parking spots, helping the environment, and potentially assisting in a bind when our own vehicle is unavailable for whatever reason.

VRE Management:

We have offered in the past carpool options several years ago. We partnered with NuRide who provides incentives for carpooling. The response was low and the program was discontinued. I will look and see if there any other programs we can look into.

Cassandra from Fairfax, VA asks:

Please do better to notify passengers of track changes at the Franc./Sprngfld station. On April 30 for the 310 train, at least 6 other passngrs were waiting w/me on the far platform, incl. a gentleman in a wheelchair. The train was a few minutes late, but as it arrived, to our dismay we discovered that the train was on the metro side of the track. We frantically rushed down the platform, up two flights of stairs, across the catwalk, then back down three flights to catch the train. There was no announcement. Not the first time. Please correct this. Otherwise, great service.

VRE Management:

We have staff who monitor the train movements and I will ask them to keep a better eye on this and make proper announcements.

Dan from Manassas, VA asks:

Has Amtrak shared with you what type of signage that they intend placing at Burke Centre, which became an Amtrak station on 1-22-2010, resuming intercity train service after 42 years?

VRE Management:

We are providing a place for Amtrak to post signage should they desire.

Stan from Manassas, VA asks:

Do the conductors have a choice as to which VRE messages are played in the cars?

VRE Management:

VRE does provide conductors with some announcements that we feel need to be made based on customer feedback. However they are able to play additional announcements should they feel it necessary.

Dan from Manassas, VA asks:

Can you share anything about the status of negotiations with Amtrak on reducing the \$10 Step-Up Charge?

VRE Management:

I am working on several different options which I will be discussing with the VRE Operations Board later this month.

Stan from Manassas, VA asks:

Dale, last month you said you would check into the overflow parking at Manassas? Can you report back to us? I talked with another person forced into the illegal parking area and heard that many commuters from Broad Run are now using Manassas because police are ticketing overflow parking on the street there.

VRE Management:

We are in communication with the City of Manassas and attempting to gain some additional parking spaces. I'll let you know if I'm successful.

Steve from Burke, VA asks:

Now that it's May, is everything still on "track" to receive the new locomotives and passenger cars? What will be the new "standard" number of passenger cars for each train? Talking to the conductors on my trains, it seems very few are staying on to work with Keolis? Have new conductors been hired yet, trained? The June change over date is coming soon.

VRE Management:

We have received all of the 71 new passenger coaches. Even with all the new cars, there aren't enough to completely replace all of the older Gallery cars. Also, we will keep them when the newer cars go out of service for maintenance. The new locomotives are still coming on schedule in July. I will have the pictures of the first one, posted to the website and/or Facebook soon.

curious from manassas park, va asks:

Do you know if Manassas Park has plans to fix some of the large potholes in the parking lot driving lanes?

VRE Management:

We plan on reconditioning this lot including restriping and new wheel stops later this summer. When the potholes were much smaller we were hoping to take care of them as part of that program. Instead, we will be looking at temporary patchwork to get us through the rest of this spring.

Elaine from Arlington asks:

On April 13th, as I boarded the 302 in Alexandria, I was having difficulty breathing. The conductor (Lori) noticed something was unusual & insisted on calling the ambulance to meet us at Crystal City. It turned out I just had a pulmonary embolism & the doctors say Lori probably saved my life. I realize that other riders were delayed because the train was held up while we waited for the ambulance (my apologies to all the 302 riders) but who knew the VRE could literally be a live saver. Thanks! (My thanks also to Lorraine, a fellow passenger, who helped me on the train.)

VRE Management:

I am glad to hear you are feeling better. Having a community watching out for you is certainly one of the many benefits of VRE. I will pass along your compliments to Lori.

Ron from Bristow, VA asks:

Two forums ago I recommended that you ask Amtrak to consider offering a discounted StepUp ticket package. Any progress on that front? Also, will Keolis pick up the cross-honor agreement even though your direct relationship with Amtrak is terminating?

VRE Management:

Cross-honoring agreement will remain when Keolis becomes the operator. I am still working to reduce the cost of Step-Ups.

Michelle from **Fredericksburg VA** asks:

According to the Free-Lance Star, the new company is going to START hiring the new conductors and such for the VRE. Shouldn't they already have that in place. I have heard that they are not going to be able to fill the bill so to speak, and that you at VRE will be up a creek, because no one wants to work for an un-tried train company, and that no one speaks French. Can you shine a light on all of these "i heards"?

VRE Management:

Keolis has already started the hiring process and we are confident they will meet the deadline. They have delivered everything we have asked of them so far.

Jake from **Manassas VA** asks:

A few years ago the VRE Manassas Park resident parking area was opened to everyone because Federal funds were used to construct the parking lot extension, QUESTION, why are the upper levels of the Manassas VRE parking garage (also built with federal funds) reserved for the city and not all persons under the same rules?

VRE Management:

The city paid for those spaces with their own money - not federal funds. They paid for and own 40 percent and we paid for (with federal funds) and own 60 percent of the garage.

JT from **Crystal City** asks:

I see Keolis has been able to hire one current Amtrak employee. But how many total train crew employees have they hired?

VRE Management:

Keolis has hired enough crew members to run our service come summer time.

Linh from **Manassas, VA** asks:

Why don't you put some of the new cars on the Manassas like like you did Train #304. You have 13 new cars out service. I can understand keeping 3 or 4 out, but 13

VRE Management:

Both the Fredericksburg and Manassas Line have one set of the older cars. While I don't know the exact number off the top of my head. I do know some of the newer cars are out of service for modifications to the HVAC, 4 year brake overhaul, and to install state-of-the-art hand dryers in the bathrooms.

Steve from Burke asks:

I have noticed increasingly that the platform TVs have error messages, are not working or just off completely. In particular, the TVs at L'Enfant have been intermittent. This brings me to an earlier conclusion that others have made, which is that the TVs are underutilized and don't really provide much value for passengers. It's a real shame you can't provide live information on delays/disruptions. You have good TVs that seem to be collecting dust...

VRE Management:

Whenever you notice a platform screen is not working properly, shoot us an email. Then we can have our IT manager look into it. We do display live delay information on the screens, we usually wait until the ten minute mark to notify passengers since trains often make up time.

Nancy from Burke, VA asks:

Thanks so much for making efforts to notify us well in advance of schedule delays. Last Friday I was able to take an earlier train and so avoided the frustration of arriving for my 6:10 train and finding it cancelled. These things go a long ways towards keeping satisfied customers, as I'm sure you know. Thanks again.

VRE Management:

Thank you for the positive comments. I understand communication is key when service disruptions occur. We do our best to keep you informed.

Dave from Gainesville asks:

I have 8 trips left on a 10-trip ticket. It's a long story but I now only use monthly tickets. Is there a way to get a refund or partial refund from VRE?

VRE Management:

Send the ticket into our office to the ATTN: Ticket Error, and we'll replace the last two rides.

DMC from Washington, DC asks:

What is the status of the second platform at Woodbridge? I know it was probably interrupted by the snow earlier this year, but I'm just wondering what type of challenges you are now facing.

VRE Management:

The Kiss-and-Ride on Route 1 should be finished in the next week or so. The second platform is still waiting for final inspections by the county. We anticipate to be able to use it by the end of June.

Pete from Woodbridge, VA asks:

When & How often will VRE trains use the new second platform at the Woodbridge station?

VRE Management:

Once approved for use by the county, VRE trains can use the new second platform. We anticipate using the main platform the majority of the time. If there are operational issues that would otherwise delay us, we would switch over and use the second platform.

Tori from Manassas asks:

Just a note about the commuter parking garage in Manassas. IF YOU HAVE A BIG PICK UP TRUCK please do not park on the ends of the rows! It makes it harder to turn. The turns are already tight. Also, there is a lady who gets off the 5:30 train everyday, runs to her car and drives off like a bat out of hell. THIS IS VERY DANGEROUS! You have almost run me and several other people over. Thanks.

VRE Management:

Courtesy reminder from a fellow passenger.

Mike from Spotsy asks:

I get a lot of overprints and skipped lines on my ten trips. I hear this is common. Is it the tickets or the machines? Does exposure to I.D. badges, cell phones or other sources of rf or magnetic radiation aggravate the problem? If you can't clearly read the latest validation, do you have to go to a conductor or risk a summons? Is this a secret plot to discourage 10-trippers?

VRE Management:

It is no secret that we are having some issues with our Ticket Vending Machines. Our fare collection Manager is working with the equipment manufacturer on a resolution. If you are having problem with your ticket validating, talk to a conductor about swapping out the remaining rides for Free Ride Certificates.

Marc from Stafford asks:

What is going on with the bridge they are building setting just south of Alexandria? Is it going on the Fredericksburg line? If so; how long will it take and when do they plan on installing it?

VRE Management:

CSX is working to replace a bridge between Alexandria and Franconia/Springfield. The installation of the bridge is expected to happen over Memorial Day weekend. I anticipate that there will be some service changes on Friday, May 28th. I am still working with CSX on the final plans. Stay tuned for details.

Pat from Manassas Park, VA asks:

Can you please move or eliminate the smoking areas on the platforms? With the growth of the system many trains cover the full platform or have the front stop at the north end of the platform, so non-smoking passengers have to breathe the smoke coming from people or the disposal unit when it smolders. My suggestions would be - in order of preference) Eliminate smoking, limit it to the parking lot, move it to 10 feet from the entrance, move it to south end of platform.

VRE Management:

Thank you for the suggestion. We cannot entirely ban smoking from the platform since all of our facilities are open air, but will consider if there is a better spot for it.

Joseph from Manassas Park asks:

Is there any bus service that runs to/from the Manassas Park station?

VRE Management:

You're the best option is to check with PRTC who operate the OmniRide and OmniLink service. Their number is 703-730-OMNI

Jessica from Manassas Park asks:

On the Monday 5:30 train leaving Union Station a conductor wrote a lady a ticket for not having her monthly pass DURING THE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT MONDAY WAS THE GRACE PERIOD and when she tried to give the conductor a free ride card he got upset. This was also her second week riding VRE. What's the point of having a grace period if tickets are going to be written anyway?

VRE Management:

During the one day grace period, riders have to have the ticket from the previous month on their person. FRCs that aren't validated do not constitute as a valid ticket. I am not aware of the this case in particular, but this is how the grace period works.

Bob from Dumfries asks:

Many thanks for initiating the morning express on the F'burg line! When do you anticipate the station stop schedule to be available?

VRE Management:

I am glad I could provide it for the riders. Once the details are worked out, we will publish the schedule and let riders know.

Charles from **Manassas VA** asks:

Is there a timetable for an express train from Manassas to L'Enfant?

VRE Management:

We do not have any plans to implement an express train for the Manassas Line, however we will keep it in mind for the future.

Roman from **Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

When will VRE better regulate the temperature and increase the warmth of its rail cars? VRE is now commonly referred to as the "Polar Express". Regardless of the time of year, riders bring coats to keep warm during their ride -- even then we shiver.

VRE Management:

We think we have a fix. We are modifying temperature sensor mechanisms on six coaches. Once in service, we will let you know which cars they are so you can provide us feedback.

Nick from **VA** asks:

What is being done to decrease the smell outside of the Fred train. When boarding or departing from the train, riders smell this mixture of brake dust, burnt electric motor brushes and human waste.

VRE Management:

Please send in the specific train information (train #, car #, etc.) to our website at <http://www.vre.org/feedback/mechanicalconcerns.php>, and our mechanical team will look into it.

m from **va** asks:

Wanna keep the e-mails in English first even if it is the 5th of May it is NOT a US holiday!

VRE Management:

Wanna? That's not even proper English. We were having some fun with our Train Talk reminder today, same way we would with Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day, even Groundhog Day. Hopefully it got your attention and made you participate in our discussion today.

Brian from **Manassas VA** asks:

Am I the only one who is worried about the new bridge being built at CR Tower? The south end of the girders say "This end North" and the north end ones say "This end South"

VRE Management:

I have full confidence that CSX is managing the project correctly. The bridge is scheduled to be put in Memorial Day; we are discussing with CSX how exactly this is going to affect our service. Stay tuned for details.

Larry from Fredericksburg asks:

Should we anticipate delays for Train 300 when the express train service starts? How much time has to separate the trains' departure/arrival station times?

VRE Management:

A departure at 5:05 will not affect current Train #300 since it will not make all stops. Depending on the territory, trains need at least 10-15 minute headways in between them.

Ed from Manassas VA asks:

What planning is VRE and the BRAC commission working on with the transfer of 3500 jobs to Ft Belvoir? Several 100 Crystal City VRE rides will be transferred next year and will no longer use VRE.

VRE Management:

VRE is working with the BRAC commission on how VRE can help but we have no additional plans at this time.

Ed from Manassas VA asks:

Last night every car on train 331 had "Standers" with no seat until Burke Station. What, other than a substantial rate increase to drive some passengers away, has VRE management devised?

VRE Management:

Unfortunately, we do not have any easy, short term solution to the crowding. We are looking at other possible storage space in DC but capital projects like that take years to finish.

LuLu from brooke asks:

The conductors do what they can and make the usual announcements asking the folks at Leeland to not block the Brooke detraining passengers along with the announcements that being in the vestibule until the train has completely stopped is prohibited, however, it appears that Leeland is full of adults that have the need to be disrespectful of polite requests. They continue to snicker at the announcements, block the Brooke riders, and defiantly occupy the vestibule. Childish, disrespectful, dangerous behaviour. Are fines, or anything else appropriate at this stage?

VRE Management:

Queuing has always been an issue, especially just before our most heavily used stations. At one time we had instituted a "Standing Means Detraining" policy. We will look at other options to discourage this selfish behavior.

mark from **The Burg** asks:

What do you foresee happening to the schedule once spotsy is up and running? Do you think the express will continue and if so do you think an afternoon express will ever be an option.

VRE Management:

I would guess that the ridership would increase when the Spotsylvania station opens. to handle that ridership, we are going to have to put more cars in service, which mean I have to find a solution to the mid-day storage. This is a very tough problem, the ridership is growing faster than we can accomodate it. the express will continue, we will look at an afternoon express and will evaluate what other service changes need to be made.

MJBucci from **Falmouth** asks:

This question has always puzzled me... The rails are flat and smooth, while the train wheels are round and smooth, yet the ride is always so bouncy and bone jarring at times, How come ??

VRE Management:

The train passes over many switches and crossovers, which are breaks in the rail and would cause some of the bumps you mention. Also, accelerating and decelerating causes the cars to move a little, like an accordion.

Elmer from **Fredericksburg** asks:

I am curious as to why VRE tip toed around so much concerning the starting and ending of trains at L'Enfant station. I understand VRE is not for profit and therefore must be supported through subsidies and user fees but it is still a business decision that must be made by management. At some point ridership will grow to a point were you will have to step up and make that call regardless if you upset the crowd, Right?

VRE Management:

We know our decision will not be popular with all riders. Concerning the last public comment on our proposed changes, the Union Station riders were very vocal about not cutting Union Station on certain trains, and we listened. Compared to other public comment periods, like when we have fare increases, the pushback was far worse from the Union Station riders.

Paul from Brooke asks:

With the new express train having a three car consist, there is a strong possibility it will be standing room only at Leland and certainly Brooke. Existing VRE 300 is about 75% capacity after stopping at Brooke. Would you consider running the new train at eight cars and the existing VRE 300 running with three cars.

VRE Management:

Once the new service starts, we will evaluate how this affects ridership on the trains and make any necessary and possible changes.

Alphonsus from Spotsy asks:

Hola! Why is it when there is a change of crew on the 300 that the train is always late getting into Fredericksburg, which impacts ontime performance further down the line?

VRE Management:

Certain train crews have certain habits, and the normal 300 crew likes to get to Fredericksburg early, which is not required. #300 has not been late getting to its final destination this week.

VRE Management:

That's all for now. The next on-line forum will be June 2. Until then, adios amigos! We're multi-lingual here at VRE!

Dale