

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, November 3rd at 12:00pm.



There are currently 61 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Greetings! Thank you for joining us today. Hope you enjoyed your treat last Friday and had a Happy Halloween. I am looking forward to your questions, I see we have a lot of good ones already. Off we go, choo, choo :)

Greg from Woodbridge asks:

While I appreciate that VRE is doing their best and many situations are out of their control, I do not feel enough is being done. I also feel that CSX doesn't take commuter rail serious enough. Can't there be some type of morning checklist, or walk through, that not only checks engines and cars, but also checks signals and rails? If you look at days when there are multiple VRE delays, you normally see switch or signal problems. The trains just start stacking up with delays left and right. There should be more done to prevent these events and CSX should be held accountable.

VRE Management:

Greg, they are very sensitive to VRE needs. Please know that I always express concern on behalf of our passengers to CSX every time there is a significant railroad related delay. Our relationship with CSX has improved leaps and bounds over the years. They constantly have maintainers and rail maintenance crews working to prevent signal and switch failures as those problems affect the performance of their trains as well. They also hinder the performance of their trains by holding most of their freight trains out of VRE territory while we operate.

Craig from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Why does the train leave early sometimes? It may only be a minute or 90 seconds, but it is early. This is happening, and someone's watch is off by at least a minute or 90 seconds.

VRE Management:

The conductors sync their watches with USNO time before their train departs the yard. Their time is the official time. As everyone watches, cellphones, timepieces are all different, we ask that riders try to show up five minutes and be ready to board before scheduled time to ensure they get on the train they want.

D from Leeland from Fredericksburg VA asks:

Is there anything that can be done for the people that que in the aisles? There are individuals who start queing at Quantico for the Leeland Road stop! These people stand in the aisles, their brief cases and other belongings hit people who are sitting in the seats closest to the doors. They prohibit people at Quantico and Brooke from detraining. If this is a safety issue, couldn't the conductors site them for a violation?

VRE Management:

Queuing has been a big concern for years as the ridership numbers have risen. I will ask the conductors to be more vigilant on this issue on both lines.

J Bryon from Bealeton, Virginia asks:

Could you make a monthly statement about the status of the VRE expanding into Fauquier County. I support the VRE but I have driving in 18 miles everyday just to get on a train for an hour train ride. An update would keep in the minds of everyone so that they could write to the Fauquier County Board of Supervisors at the Warren Green Building, 10 Hotel Street, Warrenton VA 22186 and ask them to work with VRE and allow it to expand into the county.

VRE Management:

Certainly riders are welcome to contact their BOS should they have any concerns about VRE service. This would include comments to Fauquier County or any other county.

Dave from Dumfries, VA asks:

Why do you keep moving the V50 around to different train sets on different lines instead of keeping on the 8-car set?

VRE Management:

The V50 has been moving to different trains in an effort to allow different engineers to become more familiar with it. As we get more locomotives through the end of the year, you will see more of them in the system.

Florie from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Would it be possible to add 1 or 2 additional cars to Trains 303 and 305? These trains are extremely crowded by the time they reach Alexandria.

VRE Management:

I would love to add cars to many trains in our system. Unfortunately space and funding have been big hurdles. We have pretty much maxed out mid-day storage in DC that prevents adding

cars. I am looking for other possible storage tracks in DC including revisiting terminating trains at L'Enfant.

Paula from Manassas, VA asks:

There have been problems with smoke coming into the cars after the train departs Union Station and goes in the tunnel. Mostly this occurs on the upper deck, but sometimes on the lower level, as well. This is a severe health hazard that needs to be addressed.

VRE Management:

I will make sure the conductors to close the dampers as the trains enter the tunnel. Please know that this will not completely eliminate all the fumes from entering the train and the newer cars do a better job than the legacy cars of doing this.

Michelle from Virginia asks:

The VRE intercom system is not clear, therefore when announcements are made, no one can understand what is being said.

VRE Management:

I am happy to look into this. If you could please send an email into gotrains@vre.org with the train number and car number that will help us concentrate our efforts

Michele from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

My compliments to Keolis conductors for their professionalism. I regularly ride 310 and 307. Yesterday I rode 301 and I thought there was an airline captain making the announcements, which made me want to go to the Bahamas instead of Stafford. Welcome aboard!

VRE Management:

Thank you. I will pass your compliments to Keolis.

Big D from Woodbridge, Va asks:

Will WiFi be available on the VRE trains soon?

VRE Management:

I will go to our board this month to request permission to give the procurement of the necessary equipment to set it up. I anticipate to have WiFi on all trains by the spring.

Debbie from Manassas Park, VA asks:

My question is: What do you do when your agency issues you a monthly train pass but you don't get it from the agency until about the 7th of the month? I am buying daily passes but it seems unfair as the agency has purchased a monthly pass and I am also paying for rides until I get my pass. Seems like double dipping to me. Can you please let me know how to handle this issue. I work for the Feds and they provide a monthly pass just always late. Thank you, Debbie

VRE Management:

Monthly tickets are available for purchase on the 10th day of the previous month. For example, you can buy a December ticket a week from today. How and when vendors send you a ticket is out of our control. You may wish to speak with the agency you get your tickets from to find a solution.

Ralph from Burke, VA asks:

How long does it take to train a new engineer/driver?

VRE Management:

That depends. For someone coming out of conductor service: 6 months in classroom and hands on mechanical experience and 500 hours, approximately 6 months, of time at the throttle under the supervision of a qualified locomotive engineer. However, Keolis is currently hiring engineers with previous experience and sometimes moving up conductors with prior engineer experience.

Debbie from Manassas Park asks:

The train interior is dirty. I've noticed trash left on the floors overnight and coffee drips on the back of chairs stay for days. This morning I could not see out of the window because the inside was filthy. What is the cleaning schedule and is it Keolis' responsibility?

VRE Management:

Yes, Keolis is responsible for the cleanliness of the cars. As with anything else please let us know what train and car number you are seeing this on so we can better concentrate our efforts.

Betty B from Burke, VA asks:

Is there a training class for engineers? Every morning we place bets as to where the train is going to stop. This a.m. (11/3 - train#328) half the doors didn't open and he pulled forward, then back, then so far forward we couldn't get on in the front car, but had to walk back to the 2nd set of doors, along with others from the 3rd set of doors. Just too chaotic. Nobody seems to notice this, certainly not the conductor! He gave us a dirty look when we complained, but no explanation.

VRE Management:

This mornings incident had a engineer trainee on it and is possible he missed the spot. We will look into it further.

David from Burke asks:

There is a metro (WMATA) bus driver that refuses to honor my VRE ticket as a transfer. He said he said has spoken with his supervisor and that WMATA doesn't honor VRE tickets on WMATA buses. I have emailed "go trains" with all the specific information (driver name, bus number, etc) and never got a reply. Can VRE ask WMATA to remind their bus drivers to take VRE tickets? thanks.

VRE Management:

VRE tickets are allowed on non-express buses. We will talk to WMATA and see what we can do.

Sheryl from Manassas asks:

For us "newbies" to commuting, how is the VRE addressing the potential for terrorist actions/threats and how can we as riders help? This is a great alternative to driving in traffic, by the way! Thanks.

VRE Management:

VRE is in constant communication with local authorities in the joint terrorism task force. As a rider, if you see something suspicious on board the train, please tell your conductor. If you see something on the platform or parking lot, please call 911.

DEB from Lorton Station asks:

1. Can someone give us a status on when lights will be installed in the far north end of the parking lot? 2. When will the dips in the road entering and exiting the Lorton Staion be fixed? 3> Love the new crews. They are ver, very polite and friendly.

VRE Management:

Fairfax County ahs indictated that they will provide lighting in the southern lot. I will contact them about the dips in the entering and exiting rows. Thanks for the compliment on the crews.

adam from woodbridge va asks:

With the holidays approaching, are conductors allowed to receive gifts from passengers. Your conductors are very proffesional and I would like to show my appreciation for all their hard work this year.

VRE Management:

I like presents, too! Seriously though I think the crews would enjoy a token of your appreciation.

Paul from Manassas, VA asks:

Are there any plans to add an express train to the Manassas line?

VRE Management:

No, not at this time.

Larry from F'Burg, VA asks:

Does VRE have an agreement with CSX, or do you know if it is CSX's policy, to not let Amtrak trains pass VRE trains even if it can safely be done? Thank you for answering and for holding these forums.

VRE Management:

I'm glad to hold these interactive sessions. By legislative mandate, Amtrak trains have priority over all other trains, passenger or freight, no matter which railroad they are operating on. Not to say a dispatcher will blatantly delay our trains to get an Amtrak train through, but they do their best to make decisions to improve the performance of the entire railroad.

Arthur from Burke asks:

Is there any chance the federal government will extend the \$230 per month transit subsidy past December? If it reverts back to \$120, do you see a corresponding reduction in VRE ridership and service cutbacks?

VRE Management:

I do not know whether the subsidy will remain the same but if anything happens it will happen during the lame duck Congress between now and the end of the year. While we may see a minor drop in ridership, I do not anticipate any cutbacks in service.

Doug from Burke, VA asks:

Dale, I want to thank you and your staff for outstanding work. I rode the MARC Penn line for 8 years and was never confident when I would get home. VRE gets an A++. When I see fellow VRE riders frustrated about something, I just say to myself, you don't know how good you have it. From informative sessions like these, to nice stations, to clean cars, and reliable locomotives, to polite and focused conductors, to clear onboard communications, you and your team have much to be proud of. Keep up your motivation to continue this excellent service. Sincerely, doug

VRE Management:

Doug, thanks for the superb mark! While I wish we were perfect, my goal is to make VRE the best ride in the country and our staff and Keolis work relentlessly to improve the customer experience in all areas.

Will from Fredericksburg asks:

Whats the status of the reduced step-up ticket prices for Amtrak?

VRE Management:

I am working the issue. And its going to become a budget issue with the baord and I will know whether I can do it or not by the end of December.

Frustrated from Fredericksburg asks:

People are so rude at Lorton Station. It would be so nice if you could please step back and wait for all of us to get off the train in the morning, before you get on.

VRE Management:

We have a number of stations that serve as both an origination and destination. Just as when you board a crowded elevator, it is always nice to let people off before you get on.

Phil from Burke Centre asks:

VRE has repeatedly stated that Keolis would bring enhanced customer service. Could you please tell us what has been enhanced? There are now less announcements on delays, which cars won't open at stations, last chance to catch either line at Alexandria, etc.

VRE Management:

I have received numerous positive comments from riders who enjoy the new conductors and their attitude in serving the passengers but there also riders who share the same views as you. I am working with Keolis to ensure passengers have the same experience across the board. Anytime you feel something could have been handled better send in specifics to gotrains@vre.org (I can't ride every train!) and we will forward to Keolis management to make sure it is addressed. They are committed as much as I am to enhancing customer service.

Frank from Rolling Road asks:

How about an automated announcement prior to Alexandria explaining that is passengers' last chance to catch a different line? Keolis seems to be worse at informing passengers than Amtrak. Is it that hard to have conductors make anouncements,especially for non routing riders? It seems it is, so let's go automated.

VRE Management:

I know conductors have been instructed to make this announcement before Alexandria on all trains and heard it myself when I ride the train from DC. Send in specifics to gotrains@vre.org and I will have it addressed.

Julie from Rolling Road asks:

Do you have a status on correcting the condensation on the windows? Since arrival of the new coaches VRE was raising the temps and putting in dryers (I think) in the HVAC system to resolve the problem. However, it still seems to be a problem. How many years can this take?

VRE Management:

We have been exploring many possible solutions to the problem to find the most cost effective fix. Our mechanical department reports that they should have the fix installed by next spring when we see the biggest accumulations of condensation. While the solution will not completely eliminate all condensation, it will be significantly reduced.

Jason from Rippon asks:

Emails and updates do not always reach their intended destination. Is there any form of iPhone/iPad/Android App in development to update riders on delays or other important news?

VRE Management:

We are currently working on some ideas and will keep you updated.

Jason from Rippon asks:

The ticket system we use seems out dated. Is there any plan to adopt a system like metro uses with Smartrip cards?

VRE Management:

We are working towards a new fare collection system. As part of the regional fare system we would like to be able to integrate our system with Metro SmarTrip system. however, this is a part of a larger collective system bigger than VRE.

Chris from Bristow, VA asks:

As I understand the issue that was presented earlier this year many passengers objected to trains terminating at L'enfant thus missing Union station. Why would a train need to terminate at L'enfant? Couldn't longer trains be stored at L'enfant and moved to Union Station when needed for service?

VRE Management:

I understand that riders do not want the any of the current trains to terminate at the L'Enfant station. However, if we were to add two trains, one of the alternative is to store the two trains at L'Enfant. Because of the heavy volume of traffic, storing at L'Enfant and moving to Union Station is nearly impossible.

KJ from Manassas, VA asks:

Why is it always so cold on the upper decks of the cars? Thanks.

VRE Management:

The vents that circulate the air for the entire car are located above the upper level seats. This creates a wind chill effect that makes it seem the upper level is colder than the lower level.

Davin from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Originally you said you would get 2 new locomotives per month starting in Nov and continuing through May. Now, you say you won't get it until Dec. Why the delay?

VRE Management:

My bad. I must have mis-spoke, the next one gets delivered the third week of Decemeber and a new one every two weeks after that. By the end of April, a new locomotive will be on every regular consist. By July we will have all 20 locomotives. All current locomotive will be moved off the property.

maria from manassas asks:

Recently, I attempted to use one of the free tickets issued when the train is delayed. ALthough I attempted to validate the ticket, the Mannassas station machine would not accept the ticket. Once aboard, I was told (rudely) that I must validate or be subject to a fine. While I understand the rules, what are passengers supposed to do when the validating machine won't accept the ticket leaving the passenger without a ticket? I offered to give the actual ticket to the conductor so she would know that I had a ticket, but she again,rudely, told me that if she took the ticket,I would be fined.

VRE Management:

First make sure the Free Rider Certificate (FRC) is valid, the current ones are teal and blue. Second, if you ever have a problem validating any ticket, please see a conductor BEFORE boarding a train and they can make a decision to let you ride or not. More often than not they will let you on. If you go to them after you board the train, you will be subject to a summons, as stated by Virginia law.

Bill from F-BURG asks:

What needs to be done to run an Express afternoon train? I want to petition my congressmen.

VRE Management:

Funding and storage are the biggest concerns when adding new trains. At the moment, I don't have the means to add another train to Fredericksburg in the afternoon. In the meanwhile, the cross honor Amtrak trains are a de facto express trains to Fredericksburg.

Mark from Lorton, VA asks:

This morning Train #306 was making good time, until we reached DC. Why did it go so slow over the bridge into DC causing us to be a few minutes late into L'Enfant? This kind of slowness is unacceptable. Instead of arriving at 7:26, we arrive at 7:30. I want to in the Metro by 7:30, because after 7:30 we have to pay an extra 20 cents.

VRE Management:

Train #306 was delayed following Train #326 which experienced minor locomotive delays at L'Enfant.

George from Leeland asks:

Why can't you skip the Springfield Station and the Rolling Road Stations on the first train home in the afternoon. You stop the train to pick up 5 people, therefore costing 10 min of time. Those people could catch the next train. This would help with your revenue as well as some of those people are riding Metro there to avoid the higher zone fee, that is costing you money!

VRE Management:

I understand that every minute is precious but I don't see this is not priority for our service right now. I am working to increase capacity.

Slim from Fredericksburg asks:

HOT Lanes are going to kill VRE if you don't put on expedited service. Who is going to take the train when you can catch a bus and save 30 minutes. What is your plan to deal with this?

VRE Management:

We welcome any improvement in all modes of transportation, especially public transportation. Revenues from HOT lanes will improve road infrastructure first which may free up other funds that could be funneled our way. We do however have the early morning express train that saves riders some trip time.

Jeanne from Manassas, VA asks:

(I haven't been at the station for 3 days (I'm in Africa), so this may be moot, I hope...) What's with the new train signals at the Manassas station? The only way to get from the platform to the road or to the parking garage is by walking underneath the signal. That can't be safe! Assuming that VRE has a plan for opening it up so people can leave and arrive more safely. Thanks! BTW, LOVE VRE! The crews are falling into a good rhythm now. Still miss the Amtrak guys, but these people are doing fine.

VRE Management:

I know that the City of Manassas is making some modifications to enable the City to be a quiet zone where trains do not have to sound their horns during certain hours. I am sure this is probably related, but let me look into it.

Stephen from Manassas, VA asks:

The schedule page mentions a cross-honor agreement between VRE and Marc, that says that you can use your tickets on trains going against rush hour traffic, but Marc doesn't have any that qualify on the Brunswick line and I can't even begin to figure which ones would qualify for the Camden line. It seems that we offer this service to Maryland commuters, but we're getting the short end of the stick.

VRE Management:

It's true that MARC only runs reverse rush hour service on the Penn Line. The Camden and Brunswick Lines operate on CSX rails and just like our Fredericksburg Line, cannot justify running more service on their already crowded rails.

Peter from Burke asks:

Suggestion: Spend a few bucks per radio and equip them with an earpiece so the rest of us don't have to listen to all the static and radio traffic. Your riders, especially those in the quiet car, will appreciate it!!

VRE Management:

Using an earpiece is a matter of choice for the train crew. However I will talk to Keolis about lowering the volume of the radios when walking through the quiet car.

Joe from Spotsy asks:

When the train travels on other than the main line (Track 3 I think), why is detraining done from the end and not the middle of the train. It always seems to happen when the train is full to gills and the aisles are standing room only. Wouldn't make sense and be more efficient to detrain from the middle instead of making everyone walk to one end through the already crowded cars.

VRE Management:

This standard procedure is done for the passengers who require special assistance who we ask to sit in the northernmost car.

Spooked and Disappointed from **Burke, VA** asks:

On Saturday, October 30th, a large "Trunk or Treat" in the Rolling Road station's parking lot was shut down by a VRE-hired security guard. He forced the cars and trick-or-treating children to leave because the group didn't have a permit. This left a bad impression on the community, some of whom are VRE riders but most of whom are not. People use the parking lot on weekends for lots of things--bike safety courses, even dancing classes. Is it really VRE's policy that station parking lots can't be used for Trunk or Treating, or that any community use of a VRE parking lot requires a permit?

VRE Management:

The Rolling Road lot is owned by Fairfax County and has roving security patrols setup to monitor on the weekends. There is a process for gaining approval for these types of activities. If they don't follow proper procedures, they may be forced to shut down.

Larry from **Woodbridge, VA** asks:

What is the status of getting the bridge from Route 1 to the VRE Station opened to access on the Route 1 side? It is my understanding that the city is preventing this from happening. What is their issue, and who in the city government do we need to be contacting to get this resolved?

VRE Management:

Access from Route 1 at Woodbridge will not be open until Kiss-and-Ride improvements have been made and approved by VDOT.

GaryF from **Goldvein, VA** asks:

Would you start looking "NOW" for designated places to store the snow after a storm that is not in the middle of the parking lot. Last year it took weeks for all the snow to melt to free up the 36 parking spaces.

VRE Management:

Every year about this time, we have a meeting with contractors on how to deal with snow storms. We are responsible for removing snow off all the platforms. The parking lot responsibilities are a hodgepodge of VRE, VDOT and local jurisdictions. Last year with the record snowfall, it was hard to find places to put any snow. We hope to deal with it better this year.

tabbycat from **Fairfax, VA** asks:

Hi, great job! I love riding VRE! I have a couple quick questions. 1) If metro option is opened on the first day of the month, can you please ask Metro to honor the previous month's ticket? Delays were severe on both 9/30 and 10/1 and I used metro both days. On 10/1 I was turned away because my pass said Sept. Going to metro is out of the way as it is--it's even worse if we have to go in the opposite direction to the VRE station first for a ticket! 2) What are the parking regulations at the Burke garage? If I have to take alternate transport home can I leave my car overnight? Thanks!

VRE Management:

Thanks for the compliments. Unfortunately the grace period does not extend to Metro Option scenarios; I will see what I can do though. You can overnight park at most of the VRE lots, including Burke Centre, at your own risk.

Marc from **Lorton** asks:

I was surprised when your conductor on 306 gave me a summons for forgetting my FRC (monthly ticket holder x2 years) on Nov. 2nd. I find this to be unduly punitive, yet actually representative of your current service. Your conductor stated that it was your policy she was enacting which struck me as pretty clueless. Are you working with your conductors to help them target people who are intentionally trying to ride for free vs. regulars who forget their FRC/ticket? A policy of just giving a summons to a rider without a ticket is just harsh; can you please review and revamp for common sense?

VRE Management:

This is an age old problem that goes well before Keolis started. If you do not have a valid ticket, you may be subject to a summons. There is a provision for monthly ticket holders to have the summons waived, if you can prove you bought it before the summons. However, there is no way for a conductor to tell just by looking at someone if they intentionally or unintentionally did not validate their ticket. I can't either. The conductor was doing her job.

Richard from **Stafford, VA** asks:

Just being nosy... How do you think VRE will be affected when Federal Employees (some contractors too) will have their transit subsidy cut by more than half in January? Do you think that passengers who boarded VRE with the added subsidy will go back to slugging and such?

VRE Management:

We are not sure exactly. We expect that some will go to other forms but some will stay due to the convenience of the train.

Mark from Manassas Park, VA asks:

Can a freight MARC train pull into the L'Enfant Plaza storage track to temporarily open up space at Union Station for VRE?

VRE Management:

Unfortunately, no. We do not use the same storage yard as MARC in Union Station.

Mike from Rolling Road asks:

Seems like the conductors still don't know how to use the automated announcements. Either they aren't on at all, or they are a station behind. But they sure know how to constantly play the courtesy reminders a million times (obviously not a million, but maybe a thousand).

VRE Management:

We have instructed the crews to monitor the automated stations announcements to ensure their accuracy. If they aren't working, they should be making manual announcements. If this is not the case, please send in specifics to gotrains@vre.org so we can address individual issues.

Bob from Burke Centre asks:

I have brought this up before on this forum, via email and in person. Why can't emails be sent from a general VRE address instead of individual employees? Half your messages went into my spam folder last month which means I didn't get them. To add VRE employees to my address book is ridiculous. Personal touch or not, it doesn't make any sense. I don't see American Airlines sending emails out from individual employee because it doesn't make sense, and they don't have a CEO that is stubborn and refuses to listen to his customers and employees (yes they agree when I speak to them in person).

VRE Management:

Bob, thank you for your suggestion. I hear your concern but we enjoy adding the personal touch to our emails because, in many cases, a lot of thought and effort has gone into them. We have a maximum of six people, including myself, who send out Train Talk messages and haven't had turnaround in a while but I will look into the possibility of your suggestion.

VRE Management:

Well that is all for today. Just a quick reminder before our next web chat on December 1st: Thursday November 11th there is no VRE service due to Veteran's Day. No service on Thanksgiving Day. Back to popular demand, the "S" schedule will operate the day after Thanksgiving. Thank you to our veterans and have a Happy Thanksgiving.

-Dale