

## Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, October 6th at 12:00pm.



There are currently 94 questions waiting to be answered.

### **VRE Management:**

Welcome to Forum! I rode #302 this morning to help with the survey. Met a few people I haven't met before. I want to thank everyone for filling out the survey, it is very important for the funding the VRE. Now, on to the questions.

---

### **DT from Broad Run asks:**

Last month someone asked about toy trains. MTH makes a variety of O-gauge VRE items. They even have the old Sounder Cars still available. <http://www.mthtrains.com/content/20-20110-3> What they don't sell are TVM machines. These seem to be a perpetual weak link to VRE. At any give time - it seems that there is always one broken at Broad Run or L'Enfant. It is not uncommon to find only one of the touch screens reacting properly but then the credit-card reader is not working. I'm trying to ride with a valid ticket - but the TVMs make it really hard sometimes.

### **VRE Management:**

For those who want toy trains, there's the plug. As for the TVMs, we know there are issues like you describe. Every machine is checked by technicians every day. One machine hasn't been down for more than 24 hours in the last few months. Weather creates issues for the screens and readers and besides regular maintenance, we are looking at upgrades that are impervious to weather. Also, we are in the process of upgrading the operating system to make the machines more reliable. TVMs aren't a quick fix, but we are on it.

---

### **Manassas from Manassas asks:**

L'Enfant has leaks in the gutter's along the front side of the platform. Some have huge holes.

### **VRE Management:**

Thanks for letting me know, I will have it fixed.

---

### **Michael from Broad Run, VA asks:**

Can something be done to regulate the temperature in the first car of the 5:45 AM train from Broad Run to Union Station? Now that it is Fall and the temperature outside is in the 50s it seems silly to have the AC on in the train. I have to wrap my face in a scarf to be comfortable. Thanks.

**VRE Management:**

I will have the Mechanical Department look into it.

---

**Caleb from VA** asks:

So we can send a man to the moon....but not run a train through a few inches of water??? Seems like a crazy thought really. Any help to all of us non-experts?

**VRE Management:**

Water is the greatest enemy to a railroad. Significant amounts of rain literally wash out the track bed. The flood restrictions are put in place for your protection. Rails that are in low-lying areas or near creeks or rivers are susceptible to washout. Trains proceed with caution during this time to ensure they do not operate over unsafe tracks. As for last Friday's Manassas cancellations, that was due to downed power lines caused by the storm that were blocking the tracks. Once Dominion Power estimated to us they couldn't get it resolved until noon, we made the decision to cancel service.

---

**Zeke from Manassas** asks:

Surplus \$\$\$ Why did I have to read about a surplus of funds in a 3 sentence Wash Post item buried on page 195? I know new cars seem like a good thing --- but if noone can park there cars at stations that is far worse than using older cars for longer! Why no emphasis on using some of these funds that parking problem which is rampant and killing growth!

**VRE Management:**

I know there are lots of people riding VRE. (I look at the ridership numbers everyday) With that, there is a need for more cars, more trains, and more parking spaces. We are working on all fronts. While I focus on improving service, the jurisdictions have to take the lead on improving parking. I help and encourage whenever I can. BTW, we will begin construction on 180 new spaces at Broad Run.

---

**Susan from Gainesville, VA** asks:

Why is it that the notification that the trains were cancelled on Friday, 10/1/2010, did not hit the 800 call in number until after 4:30am. I called at 4:30, no delays, and went on getting ready for work. Got to the parking lot at 5:10 and found out that there was no service. This was an hour out of my way to get to the parking lot and then back out to I66 to catch the Vienna Metro, and then

I had to pay for parking for that day. The day before I had spent 3 hrs getting to work and then 4 hrs getting home on the train. Nonetheless, I was not a happy camper both days.

**VRE Management:**

When we made calls early that morning (around 3am), Dominion Power estimated that the problem should be cleared in an hour or two. The first Manassas train doesn't go through the area until almost 6am so we thought there would be some initial delay but could still operate. Then at approximately 4:30am, we received word that the situation probably wouldn't get fixed until noon (I am sure they were dealing with issues all around the area because of the storm). We sent word out ASAP when we cancelled Manassas Line service.

---

**Mark from Lorton, VA asks:**

Why did CSX make only Train #307 go slow yesterday and not other VRE trains? Conductor said train in front of us, railtime said signal problems

**VRE Management:**

The signals near Lorton were having some issues yesterday afternoon. To the train crew it probably simulated the same kind of signals as if there were a train in front of them. Thankfully there was a CSX maintainer that took care of the problem quickly so other trains did not have to incur this delay.

---

**Ellie from Stafford, VA asks:**

I have been riding VRE for 3 years and yesterday was astonishing, a person in military uniform "screaming need a doctor, need a doctor" the train stopped and went backwards. It let 20 people off because the door did not open so they miss their stop. Is this going to be the reaction of the engineer and conductor? it caused unnecessary delay, also Ana Tarheart?? stated the FRC is going away, because there are too many mechanical issues, how true is it, do I need do start looking for another way to get to and from work, because VRE is not a reliable transportation, it is not the riders fault

**VRE Management:**

I was on Train #307 last night, what happened is that a door did not open at Quantico, causing 20 people to be stranded after it left Quantico. Someone did scream they needed a doctor but that was their way to get the train to stop. Once the crew realized there were 20 people left, they got permission to back up to Quantico. I am not happy with the conductors did not determine that the doors did not open and still had people wanting to get off. This is a preventable incident and have expressed my concern with Keolis.

---

**Jim from Burke, VA asks:**

Help! We need more seats on the Manassas #326. Can you add a car?

**VRE Management:**

I am looking at some options that will allow me to add cars to our most crowded trains. I will know more by

December if I can make it work.

---

**Jhonny from Burke asks:**

Who does your estimates?? -- I was floored when I read the article on surplus that said ' VRE had not seen or estimated an increase in ridership' hence the surplus in funds. So more people to area, more cars/congestion -- and someone estimates that the % increase \$ for tickets would mean no more riders? Not sure if you know it but the majority of riders get tickets from gov't or work for free - and are not affected! seems so simple - yet not for VRE.

**VRE Management:**

The surplus is from FY2010. We started planning that budget in Oct 2008, since FY2010 starts in July 2009. At that point we couldn't have predicted the surge in ridership especially after a 16% fare increase and since we were in the middle of an economic slump. I feel a positive 5% surplus is pretty near the mark and much better than a budget that ended up in the red.

---

**Jennifer from Burke asks:**

It's a little early but any idea when Santa train info will be published? Thank you!

**VRE Management:**

I have my wish list already but all I can tell you right now is that Santa trains info will be available mid-November.

---

**Jamie from Fredericksburg, VA asks:**

I realize that communication is important however on train 300 the announcements are a bit much. I actually timed all of the announcements from Fredericksburg one morning and it was well over 6 minutes on the PA. Can either the announcements be shortened down some or the volume be reduced in the quiet car? I sit in the quiet car for a reason not to hear the conductor talk about weather and the sort. Thanks

**VRE Management:**

There is always a fine line between too few and too many announcements and while we have gotten comments from riders appreciating announcements on this train we also get comments from those who do not. I will see what I can do.

---

**Ruben** from **Woodbridge** asks:

Sir When will the Woodbridge "Kiss and Drive" will open???

**VRE Management:**

Kiss and Ride will not open until VDOT approves a plan for entrance into the area. Initially, they did not want to approve any plan. We are now going back to have them reconsider to make this area usable. Hopefully I will know something by November.

---

**Cathi** from **Manassas** asks:

Would you consider running an S schedule on the Monday holidays such as Columbus Day and Veterans Day when the government is closed but not the rest of us?

**VRE Management:**

We used to operate an "S" schedule on these holidays but was eliminated a number of years ago due to budget constraints. I will continue to keep it on the back burner should our financial situation improve.

---

**Rachael** from **Falmouth, VA** asks:

Can you explain how it is fair that when the trains are running late you skip the Leeland Road and Brooke Road riders? I pay just as much money as anyone else yet these stops always seem to be passed by when your trains have issues. How about loading the 1st three stops and passing Rippon and Wdbg? they have more alternative transportation choices than people in the Fredericksburg area.

**VRE Management:**

This is a complicated issue that will be tough to fully explain in this forum. I plan on having an article about skipped stops in the next VRE Update which will be on board on all trains on the 20th.

---

**Jen** from **Rolling Road** asks:

What's the status of the delivery of the new locomotives? How about new cars? It's always disappointing to be on an old train set ... which are starting to smell and look tired. I feel like the rides on the old cars should be half price. But I'm excited about the new engines!

**VRE Management:**

Second locomotive arrives to VRE on December 23, 2010 and then the rest start being delivered every two weeks after that with the last locomotive (20th) delivered on July 30, 2011. Around April/May every train should have a new locomotive. For railcars, we have 30 legacy cars that must be replaced. I am now going to move to replace them. But of course, I have to find money

first. I think within the next 2-3 years I should have a program to replace those 30. For you that have been around for the last 10 years, you have witnessed the incremental improvement in our equipment. It has taken a lot of help from a lot of people from the federal, state, and local governments to fund this equipment. The total cost for the 20 locomotives and 71 railcards was over \$200 million.

---

**Michael 703-577-3576 from Manassas, VA** asks:

After 17 years of riding VRE, I had my first encounter with a summons. I normally pay a monthly ticket, and have never encountered any problems. I used a free ride certificate (I have many) since our transit benefits were not available as of yet. In the afternoon rush, I inadvertently boarded the southbound train without validating the free ride certificate. The train had barely left the station when I realized it, I immediately proceeded to see conductor McClean, who wrote me a summons. The VRE policy was always to come to the conductor immediately, which I did.

Why the intolerance?

**VRE Management:**

You are required to have a valid ticket prior to boarding the train. If you have a problem you are supposed to notify the conductor prior to boarding, not after the train has left the station.

---

**David from Quantico** asks:

Hey, what happened to those dual level cars with the tables in the middle on each level. Those were cool.

**VRE Management:**

We sold those to Maryland in an effort to standardize our fleet with one type of railcar.

---

**Jane from Rolling Road** asks:

I just want to thank the conductors who came to the aid of the man who collapsed on the platform during the delays caused by Thursday's rainstorms. It was much appreciated by those of us who were standing near him when it happened.

**VRE Management:**

I am glad to hear that the crew handled this well. Their ability to respond to emergencies is a very important part of their training to me.

---

**Melanie from Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

Is there anyway to bring Amtrak back? We are getting back into real business after the summer and we cannot afford to be late anymore.

**VRE Management:**

This contract is for at least five years. While we have seen some delays caused by the transition, most have been outside of Keolis' control.

---

**Greg from Springfield, VA** asks:

Why has train # 324 been equipped with all older passenger cars (except the first car) for the past month or so. When will it get back the new cars?

**VRE Management:**

The change to the legacy cars is semi-permanent and don't see another switch soon. Train #326 which used to have the legacy cars, which operates two trains in the afternoon. We decided to operate more of the newer equipment for more trains as they have less reliability issues.

---

**Randy from Bristow VA** asks:

Wage Works contacted customers this week and advised them that Congress failed to extend the taxes deductions (\$230) for rail and everything reverts back to prior levels of \$120, while drivers who commute utilizing a parking garage will be entitled to roughly \$200 (tax break). I thought the idea was to get the cars off the road. What is the VRE's position? Also, will the government departments revert to older - prior levels as well?

**VRE Management:**

Congress could still extend the federal benefit during the lame duck session. My understanding is that there is a lot of political support to extend it at least a year. Currently it is due to expire at the end of this calendar year.

---

**Craig from Burke VA** asks:

My question regards the serious overcrowding that has begun on train 329. For quite a while people have had to stand in the isle and sit in the stairwell. Recently the crowding has increased so people are standing in the upper decks. With no room to move it is nearly impossible to make your way to the stairwell. I myself fell recently fell down the steps trying to move around someone sitting on the steps but refused to move. What can you do?

**VRE Management:**

I know #329 is overcrowded but we don't have any more room to add cars to trains in our mid-day storage yard. We proposed a plan earlier this year that added cars but meant some trains would only go to L'Enfant. The response was overwhelmingly negative. I am continuing to look for increasing train storage capacity so we can accommodate more people.

---

**Frank from Manassas Park** asks:

Dale, Announcements are a perennial problem. Crew member voices range from loud and clear to soft and missed (they are human). You stated in your last chat that you were trying to get the PA systems set for 78 dB. Sadly, I have to tell you that by a few spot checks I did with an uncalibrated sound meter, the creaking can exceed that, especially going through switches. You may want to have sound level survey done and reconsider if 78 dB is high enough. It's hard to get this right. Still, the acoustics are better than an airport most of the time!

**VRE Management:**

Thanks for the info. We will continue to work the problem.

---

**Jason from Fredericksburg** asks:

We seriously need more bike racks in Fredericksburg. I mentioned that to a girl this morning as I was locking my bike up and she agreed. Some mornings bikes are just all over the place near the bike racks. It is usually pretty difficult to get my bike off the rack and out of the area without knocking over a bike or pulling someone bike off the rack. The current racks also leave green paint all over the bikes because of the way they hang on them. From what I asses, there is plenty of space further to the right of the one group of racks to add more.

**VRE Management:**

I will contact the City of Fredericksburg to see if additional bike racks can be installed.

---

**frances from quantico va** asks:

monday oct 4th was mine and several others usual day off, and i was wondering how do those of us get one of the "bookmarks" that was left on the seats of the trains on monday???

**VRE Management:**

Please send an email to [gotrains@vre.org](mailto:gotrains@vre.org) and we will be sure to send you one.

---

**Frustrated from Spotsy** asks:

I ride to Lorton and as we TRY to get off the train there, there are people trying to get on. It would be the polite thing to do as to wait until we get off and then you can get on.

**VRE Management:**

This is certainly a good courtesy item. We will work on creating some reminders.

---

**rob from manassas** asks:

Why can't you update the platform information at Union Station? Has be wrong several times over the last few weeks.

**VRE Management:**

Amtrak is responsible for updating the monitors at Union Station and the same for track assignments. I will remind them the importance of getting these track assignments updated as quickly as possible.

---

**robert from lorton** asks:

would it be possible to install a video monitor at union station? when there are service disruption issues there is NO information available to union station - Amtrak employees don't know what's happening although they often try to find out and there is never a VRE or Keolis rep at the station.

**VRE Management:**

This is the other communication difficulty at Union Station. The device we have there is the old led system. We know it is not working properly. We are going to try and correct it with parts from other leftover signs. My hope is to have it fixed in two weeks.

---

**Debbie from Stafford, VA** asks:

Please remind the people sitting in the "Quiet Car" that they are not allowed to talk on their cell phones. Recently I had to remind a few people. Maybe more Quiet Car window fliers need to be placed in the Quiet Car so that people are aware of the rules.

**VRE Management:**

I will pass this along.

---

**Jeannie from Fredericksburg, Va** asks:

Has a flash flood ever occurred along the tracks? Just wondering what would happen in case one did occur.

**VRE Management:**

It has happened, which is the reason for flash flood restrictions. A flood washes out the track bed underneath the tracks and would be unsafe to operate a train across.

---

**Martin from Fairfax, VA** asks:

On Friday October 1, service on the Manassas line was cancelled due to low overhanging electrical wires along the route. Many of us checked the VRE website that day looking for any

delays because of the serious disruption that speed restrictions had caused the previous day. However, there was absolutely nothing on the VRE main webpage to indicate that service had been cancelled. An announcement of the cancellation finally did come onto the TV news at about 5:12 AM but by then, many of us had already left for the train station. We frequently hear that for latest service interruptions and updates that we should look at [www.vre.org](http://www.vre.org). However, there is nothing on that page about problems. If one is really persistent one can find it buried several links down after wading through the various menus. But when you're trying to get to the station 10 minutes early as you recommend, one doesn't have time to figure out where it is hidden on the website. We know about the e-mail option but E-mail is not always available. You need to have a prominent "current services alerts and updates" heading/link on the main VRE webpage – [www.vre.org](http://www.vre.org) – that takes you directly to service outages and delays.

**VRE Management:**

Whenever we have service alerts, the website is one of the first things we update. This is done in the form of a box that pops up when you visit our homepage. If your browser is not set to refresh, you may not see the service alert after we post it.

---

**Gimpy from Warrenton VA asks:**

At 6:20 AM all the handicapped spaces at Broad Run are taken. VRE staff says that the ratio of spaces is correct for the total number of parking spaces IN THE LOT, so no handicapped spaces will be added. The ratio does not cover all the spaces in the driveway and on Piper Lane. If you re-stripe the handicapped spaces, taking some of the extra space between them, you could add more without taking any away from the regular spaces. Your staff tells us disabled people to "go to another station" or "take an earlier train". This is not helpful.

**VRE Management:**

Parking is at a premium at Broad Run as the lot fills up quickly. All riders have to make the same choice you describe. We are beginning construction of 180 additional spaces there and we will then increase the handicapped parking.

---

**Cassandra from Fairfax, VA asks:**

Will VRE honor riders with FRCs for the complete cancellation of service on the Manassas line on Friday, October 1? I have a monthly ticket and assume I would do the mail-in request. Thank you.

**VRE Management:**

Unfortunately we do not offer FRCs for days that we do not provide any service. However, we are willing to work with riders who have a 5-Day pass and unable to use 20% of their ticket. If you are 5-Day pass holder and affected by this, please contact our office.

---

**S From Manassas from Manassas** asks:

Just wanted to say I really like the new crew... Keep up the good work :)

**VRE Management:**

Thanks for the kind words, I will be sure to forward them to Keolis.

---

**Bill from Rolling Road** asks:

Over 100 questions. That says it all. VRE is crumbling.

**VRE Management:**

Bill, the number of questions doesn't always mean they are all unhappy. I get all different types of questions including compliments and complaints.

---

**Mike from Burke VA** asks:

On 9-21-10, 331 was delayed 39 minutes to Broad Run. It was so late that later train passengers were being picked up at the same time as the regular passengers. This caused some serious crowding. At what point would/should 331 have skipped L'Enfant/Crystal City?

**VRE Management:**

While this was considered, Train #309 was also delayed ahead of #331 so expressing it for time savings would not have occurred. As for the crowding, if the conductor feels the train is too crowded, he will make the decision not to pick up passengers.

---

**Paul from Nokesville, VA** asks:

I understand Norfolk Southern makes the rules for speeds on the track from Alexandria to Broad Run, but I don't understand why a freight train can go 45 mph during flash flood warnings while a passenger train can only go 15 mph. Can you apply pressure on Norfolk Southern to have the same speed for passenger trains?

**VRE Management:**

Human lives are much more valuable than any load of freight cargo. That said, I will approach Norfolk Southern about changing their flash flood restrictions.

---

**John from Fredericksburg VA** asks:

I was wondering: Why does CEO Dale Zehner keep repeating what he expects of riders? I have read the same quote from him a number of times. It seems condescending, rude and not good

customer service. I work in customer service and If I ever started telling our customers what I expect of them, I would not have a job very long.

**VRE Management:**

Our riders do have some the right to expect a certain level of cusrtomer service. As with anything, along with those rights you have certain responsibilities. I have instructed crews we are not going to hold a train for someone that is not on the platyform. It is not fair to inconvenience 600 people for 1 person that is late. Second, you must have a valid ticket. If you don't have a valid ticket on the train, you will get a summons, unless there is a situation with our fare collection equipment not functioning properly and you speak with the conductor prior to boarding.

---

**Mayah C from Manassas Va** asks:

When will the VRE add weekend service?

**VRE Management:**

This is on the back burner along with adding an "S" schedule on holidays. I would love to be able to offer weekend service. Unfortunately, it is just not an option with our present budget.

---

**Bob from Stafford** asks:

Any word on when service will be back to normal speed south of Quantico where the coal cars derailed?

**VRE Management:**

I don't have any details but will look into it.

---

**Larry from F'Burg,VA** asks:

For the second day in a row, my train was delayed because of difficulty contacting a CSX foreman. I was told he wasn't answering his phone. Is there a way to complain to CSX? I get in trouble at my job if I am not where I am supposed to be.

**VRE Management:**

Any delays as a result of railroading issues are always brought to the attention of the host railroad. We constantly work together to make sure we get you to your destination on time. They want our trains to be on-time, too.

---

**Ray from Fairfax, VA** asks:

Why are some of the trains not showing up on Rail Time nor the Manual Tracking table?

**VRE Management:**

As with cell phones, sometimes the modems don't always get service. If it is a hardware issue, it is dealt with immediately, but sometimes doesn't come back on-line until back in the yard. We rely on service coverage from the same cell phone network. They should always show up on the Manual Tracking table.

---

**Bill from Springfield** asks:

We are getting close the dreaded "leaf oil on tracks" period. Is there something VRE can do to combat this annual frustration?

**VRE Management:**

The host railroads actively monitor the leaves falling on the tracks and clear them as they see them. We have "sanders" that drop sand on the tracks that helps a little but short of eliminating the trees a mile on both sides of the tracks, there is not much we can do to avoid this problem that affects rail systems all over the world.

---

**Shaun from Stafford** asks:

Mr. Zehner, I've been on train 313 in the evening and tested out the Wifi. It works fine until the train gets just a ways past Quantico. I believe you've stated in the past you do not want to impliment WiFi until you can get it working on both lines uninterrupted. I would much rather have WiFi until Quantico than no WiFi at all. That does not bother me as I "detrain" at Brooke. Would you consider an 80% solution as opposed to all or nothing?

**VRE Management:**

I am considering changing my position. Verizon is going to install additional coverage in Stafford. Now I have to fund the cost. I will go to Board in December with a plan.

---

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

Why was the Manassas line trains cancelled on 10/1? Amtrak trains weren't cancelled.

**VRE Management:**

Low power lines were blocking the tracks just south of Alexandria. Estimates were given that is wouldn't be fixed until noon. Amtrak only has a couple trains that pass through in the morning and they can wait it out. Our service cannot.

---

**John from Manassas, VA** asks:

What origination station has the most riders who walk to the VRE.

**VRE Management:**

I can't remember off the top of my head but I remember Fredericksburg having a lot.

---

**YGO from F'burg, VA asks:**

Any thoughts on adjusting the Express train schedule so it arrives to Union Station earlier? Any thoughts on adding another express train in the afternoon? Thanks!! Very pleased with the service these days.

**VRE Management:**

We are discussing with CSX to alter the time the time at Woodbridge since we have been getting there early under normal circumstances. This would put it in Union Station a few minutes earlier.

---

**chuck from Manassas, VA asks:**

Can you guys get any more awesome? The VRE is the best ride in town. . .

**VRE Management:**

Awww shucks. You made my day!

---

**VRE Management:**

That wraps up another hour. I appreciate all of your comments and suggestions. While I cannot act on all of them, know I am keeping them in mind for the future. Hope you have a great month, I will chat with you again on November 3rd.

-Dale