

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, September 8th at 12:00pm.



There are currently 53 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Happy September. I hope you all had a n excellent three-day weekend. I see we have got a lot of good questions. I look forward to answering them. So let's get to it.

Thankful from **Manassas** asks:

Thank you.. The on time performance has improved drastically as promised... The new locomotive is simply beautiful... Saw her for the first time today...

VRE Management:

It is my pleasure and I am glad you noticed. We will start receiving more new locomotives in December.

Manners Please from **Manassas** asks:

Could you please remind riders that earphones should be used when using Radio's & hand held games? For some reason more riders are not muting their games. Could you also mention that feet belong on the floor and not on the seats? Since the conductors are not making those announcements for "proper manners" it seems like it is slipping again.

VRE Management:

I will ask the conductors to make those courtesy announcements and they will be mentioned in written reminders as well.

Todd from **Broad Run** asks:

Compliment to Keolis. While I miss Mr. Calway, I note that the new staff seem more engaging and friendly than the average Amtrak folks before. I know they've probably been trained this way. I worked for Six Flags so I recognize the "happy posture." ;-) But it works. Thank you.

VRE Management:

I will pass along your compliments. We are all dedicated to making VRE the best ride in the country.

Sissy from Broad Run asks:

First of all, I wanted to say thank you to the new contractor for making honest attempts to improve service reliability. Now a suggestion. I think the conductor tries to line up to the platforms using the "eyeball" method. Why don't you guys place a visible mark on the platforms like the previous contractor did?

VRE Management:

You are welcome. I know performance was slipping for awhile but we are headed back in the right direction. Keolis had been looking into matters about the visible marks, I'll check and see where they are with that.

Cathy from Springfield, VA asks:

Now that we have the express train (300), the next train (302) has more than enough seats for everyone. Are you going to move one of that train's cars to train 304 so that there are enough seats for all fare-paying riders? It seems unwise to have empty seats on 302 and standing riders on 304. It is hard to see how this can be storage yard capacity limitations since the total number of cars is unchanged from the current number.

VRE Management:

1 – Part of the idea of the express train was to lighten the load on the 5:15am train. 2 - We will continue to monitor the daily numbers now that the express train has been in operation for almost two months and as ridership increases in the fall. 3 – Keep in mind, switching trainsets around would be much easier than changing the size of them, remember we have to consider that the same trains also run as trains in the afternoon.

Diana from Washington DC asks:

When is the next ticket fare increase scheduled or expected to be?

VRE Management:

Right now I would not expect a fare increase until July 2012 at the earliest.

David from Alexandria, VA asks:

With both 306 and 308 running nearly 30 minutes late this morning, why was the Metro Option not opened on the Fredricksburg line?

VRE Management:

306 was only 10 minutes late while 308 was approximately 25 minutes late. We normally only open the Metro option when we think the delay is going to be 30 minutes.

DEB from Spotsy asks:

Why don't the conductors check tickets on the evening trains? They check them in the morning, but not in the evening. Why is that?

VRE Management:

Conductors should check tickets morning and evening. Maybe not all cars, but should check. I'll work with the conductors on this.

Mike from Springfield, VA asks:

Last Thursday, when Train #307 was delayed leaving Union Station due to HEP problems, why didn't the train leave right away without power instead of waiting 50 minutes or why didn't Amtrak let it leave?

VRE Management:

I was frustrated with the delay on #307 on Thursday and I know that riders prefer that the train be on time and I reached an agreement with Amtrak that when a train with HEP issues will leave on-time albeit dark and without HVAC. We'll let riders know when this is the case so riders who wish to take a lighted and ventilated train can make that choice.

Mark from Fredericksburg asks:

The new conductors are great. Friendly and professional. On the 308 in the morning my ticket is checked every day. When is construction to begin on the line to Spotsylvania and Cherry Hill Stations?

VRE Management:

Thanks for the compliment. Construction on Spotsylvania and Cherry Hill will hopefully start within 6 months to a year.

Jim from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Since the new operators have taken over we no longer get email or text updates to vre service interruptions. Why is that?

VRE Management:

VRE continues to send out our Train Talk delay messages. If you are not receiving them, please contact gotrains@vre.org, so we can review your settings.

Big D from Woodbridge, Va asks:

Is there anyway the 305 train leaving Union Station at 4:10 pm could be moved back to the previous time of 4:05 pm? Or even leave Union Station at 4:00 pm?

VRE Management:

Amtrak added a state-sponsored train that leaves Union Station at 3:55p. Train #305 schedule was adjusted as a result. I do not anticipate this train operating any earlier.

Al from Bristow, VA asks:

Why have the pre-recorded announcements regarding courtesy to fellow riders, queing, and other topics been discontinued on the Manassas Line(322,329)? These announcements serve as reminders to passengers to act responsibly.

VRE Management:

Good comment. We'll start working with the crews to start using the pre-recorded announcements more.

Trevor from Manassas, VA asks:

I'd just like to drop a quick comment thanking Keolis for doing such a good job recently. It's been a rough summer on the VRE, but over the past few weeks things seem to have stabilized. Keep it up!

VRE Management:

Thanks again for the compliment. I will let the crews know you noticed the improvement.

Donna from Stafford asks:

"Late arriving equipment?" Really? Is that just another way of saying the engineer overslept or there was a long line at the donut shop? Generally speaking, I think the Keolis people are doing a great job, but it's delays like the one this morning, with explanations like that, that tend to irritate. What really gives?

VRE Management:

I understand your concern. Unfortunately it takes a while for the information to get to us from the

field. When that happens, we tend to use generic reasons for delays. In the case of #306, there was a mechanical problem leaving the train yard.

David from Richmond VA asks:

Is there any possibility of getting the Amtrak step up ticket valid to Ashland or Richmond?

VRE Management:

No. Step-up tickets are only valid within the VRE territory.

JB from Fredericksburg asks:

I realize that people will queue up prior to their stop... even several stations before their stop. There are some groups that queue for Leeland and Fredericksburg before we even get to Quantico (particularly on train 303). However, do they need to hold the doors to vestibule open the entire way?

VRE Management:

I will ask the conductors to address the queuing issue and tell riders not to hold the doors open.

Karl from asks:

I noticed yesterday's VRE train 329 used a different consist than it normally does. The older legacy coach cars were no longer used on the train in lieu of the newer coaches. This was a nice change and I was wondering if it will be permanent? Are you retiring all the older coach cars?

VRE Management:

No we are not retiring the older coaches, they have been moved to a different trainset. This is a semi-permanent change. While I don't have plans to move the equipment again, it is always a possibility.

Brett from Dale City asks:

Can go into details related to the Sep 3rd disruption of service caused by a disabled Freight Train near Quantico and why it took so long to fix.

VRE Management:

A disabled freight train needed to be re-wheeled, the locomotive had a frozen axle, so that they could move it out of the way of our service. Trains had to be stopped while they put the new wheels on to protect the mechanics. Once the wheels were on, traffic was slowed while passing the train until it could move out of the way.

Jeff from Woodbridge asks:

What can be done about the perception that CSX doesn't communicate well with VRE and/or doesn't see the importance of passenger rail service?

VRE Management:

It's tough to change perceptions. All we can do is run the trains on time and when we don't, we need to communicate what happened and lessons learned. I can say CSX does value passenger rail service and partners with Virginia to improve rail infrastructure for the benefit of both passenger and freight rail.

Ken from Fredericksburg VA asks:

Any update on progress for installing WIFI on the trains? I found it one morning-was that a test run, or someone else? It worked better than my regular service I get thru Verizon. Thank you,

VRE Management:

We are running a single test network and trying to work out the kinks to get continuous reliable service. We should know something in a month.

Steve from Dumfries asks:

Where do you currently see areas for improvement in VRE's relationship with CSX? What is being done to move toward said improvements?

VRE Management:

We have come a long way with our relationship with CSX. It has improved significantly over the past 5 years. The reality is that dispatchers have to make tough choices. Quite often riders don't see the times when those decisions disrupt freight trains. Watch and see how many freight trains are stacked on track #1 so they will not delay VRE trains.

David from Richmond VA asks:

I'd like to send a compliment to the staff of the 303 Southbound! They have been great getting us into Fredericksburg on time and I'd just like to say what a joy David Goble has been. He's happy and courteous to all the passengers, and makes the trip home a little more enjoyable. Great Job Guys!

VRE Management:

Thank you. I will let Keolis management know.

On the Platform and On Time from Manassas, VA asks:

Hi! I realize that the conductors are trying to be courteous waiting for those who are just pulling into the parking lot as the train loads but how fair is that to the several hundred people who are on time and on the platform and left waiting for these people. This happens at every station and each time that's another minute or two added to our commute. Maybe if these runners were made to wait for the next train they would be on time. Thanks for your time!

VRE Management:

I am working with the crews to decrease the dwell times of the trains, including leaving latecomers behind. If no one is on the platform and it is time to leave, the crews are instructed to depart.

Lisa from Manassa, VA asks:

Thank you for the opportunity to chat with you. Dale, have you considered riding the train one morning or afternoon to see what the average rider experiences?

VRE Management:

I am regular rider on the Manassas Line. Also when meetings or other needs arise, I do ride the Fredericksburg Line on occasion as well. I understand some of the concerns our riders face as I am frequently experiencing them as well.

Fred-Vegas from Fredericksburg asks:

Recently I mentioned to VRE that I've noticed A LOT of freeloaders riding from Union Station to Franconia/Springfield. I've also noticed that a lot of conductors have started asking for tickets before the train gets to Springfield instead of on the stretch of track near Lorton. Has this been effective in stopping the freeloaders?

VRE Management:

We have instilled in our new crews that this is the only way to protect the fare revenue.

kyle from Bealeton asks:

I got a letter from the Governor in response to a letter that I wrote to him about the constant end biting between VRE and Fauquier County. He stated that he was looking into it noting that PTRC and the Fauquier County BOS were talking about joining the VRE. Do you have any word on this.

VRE Management:

There are ongoing conversations between Fauquier County, PTRC, and VRE concerning Fauquier joining PTRC and VRE. No real status to date.

Joan from Manassas, VA asks:

Hello, thanks for talking with us. I had 2 negative experiences with train conductors. In each instance, I emailed VRE about the incident. Both times, VRE replied with information on how to get an FRC. I would like the problem addressed....not the FRC. Since I mentioned FRC, what is the time limit on the FRC? 30-minute delay after scheduled arrival time? 60-minute? It seems some of the conductors do not know. I've also seen conductors handing out FRCs to the same person in a 2-day period.

VRE Management:

I am currently working the FRC issue with Keolis. While I would hope that the number of instances that one is needed will go down I know they are an important customer service tool when delays do happen.

Eric from Burke asks:

Can VRE add a beep or something to the conductor's announcements? More and more, we don't even realize an announcement is being made until it stops. Many of the conductors have pretty soft voices and seem afraid to speak up. The automated announcements come in best of all.

VRE Management:

First, we are having every railcar checked to make sure the PA system is set to 72 dB including the Quiet Car. I will work with the conductors and instruct them on the best technique for making manual announcements. In the meantime, I am also stressing use of all automated announcements. You should see improvement in the next month.

Jason from Fredericksburg asks:

What's the status of wireless on the VRE?

VRE Management:

Still working the kinks out.

Tom from Spotsy asks:

Thanksgiving is coming and I feel that you folks should have a sit down talk with the FRED people. Last year when the VRE was operating on the day after Thanksgiving, the FRED, VRE Feeder service was not in operation only because they felt like giving their folks the day off. I purchase monthly tickets for both the VRE and the FRED service. I feel that I had paid for a ride on that day!

VRE Management:

I will chat with the folks at FRED but I cannot make any guarantees.

Joan from Fredericksburg asks:

I've definitely noticed a difference in being on time since the last online forum. Can you name a few of the changes that were made to help the trains be on time?

VRE Management:

The crews are getting used to running the trains day-to-day and more mechanical personnel were brought in to combat those issues.

Mandy from Manassas asks:

While we as passengers have an obligation to properly display our tickets at all times, don't the conductors have a responsibility to come to the second level and check our tickets rather than hitting us on the foot from the main level and waking us up? It is very infuriating when I am properly following your guidelines.

VRE Management:

I think this is an area where we need compromise. Yes passengers need to have their tickets displayed at all times and I agree that is probably easier to check tickets if they walk up to the second level. If you do your part, I will work with Keolis on that issue.

HeavyG from Manassas, VA asks:

There has been an increase in the dirtiness of the cars in the last month, particularly the back of seats and the area around cup holders. This has been observed on multiple trains and cars on the Manassas line. Per a phone call to your offices, the cleaning contractor has not changed, which begs the question what has?

VRE Management:

Your comment disturbs me because I take pride in the cleanliness of the equipment. I will immediately have VRE personnel inspecting the equipment. If they find what you mention, it will be taken care of.

To other riders: this is the first time in my memory that I have received a complaint about the cleanliness of the cars. I ask you all to keep an eye on this and let us know how we are doing. Please remember to provide the car and train number if you see problems.

Angie from Manassas, VA asks:

I frequently board the train at Union Station in the evening and have a suggestion regarding announcements. Could you ask the conductors to wait until the train clears the tunnel to make any announcements? The combination of the train rattling and squeaking as it shifts on the track and the horn/engine echoing in the tunnel are so loud that it overpowers anything the conductors are saying. Last night train 333 was experiencing a problem with the A/C and the conductor was trying to tell the riders something but it was almost impossible to hear. Thank you!!

VRE Management:

Duly noted. I will pass it on.

Bob from Burke VA asks:

Could you please confirm that quiet cars are located next to the locomotive? There have been times that the car with the quiet stickers are not located next to the engine and I have been "scolded" about talking. I politely inform them that the quiet car is not based on the stickers, but the location.

VRE Management:

You are right, the Quiet Car is the one next to the locomotive. As cars are moved around, the stickers should be removed if the car doesn't remain in the "Quiet" position. I will work with Keolis to ensure that these stickers are removed appropriately.

MJBucci from Leeland St. asks:

Were you able to view the signage outside the communications tower at Leeland st. yet ? Can you give us the update on the risks associated with this tower as posted on the tower gate?

VRE Management:

Yes, I have seen the signage and I will have an engineer give me an assessment of the situation.

Steve from Burke asks:

I must compliment the "new" conductors for being much nicer than the old staff as they are polite and have basic social skills. However, can you please remind them to make regular announcements and updates in case of delay? They still seem to inconsistent and would appreciate more regular updates on the delays.

VRE Management:

I must say I am enjoying all of the compliments I will send a reminder to Keolis on providing regular announcements during delays which I hope will become fewer.

Tim from Fredericksburg asks:

What's with the new engines? It seems like there have been a lot of problems with them since they came online. I know one day the lights and AC went out one. All in all, how are they fairing?

VRE Management:

We have one new engine and have been pleased with its performance thus far.

Jason from Fredericksburg asks:

The other day, I was looking at the zone map for the VRE. How were the zones determined? It's pretty clear that the zones are not all the same size and were adjusted to include certain cities. Is there any chance of changing these slightly? Like maybe including Fredericksburg in zone 8, and merging zones 7,8,and 9.

VRE Management:

It is mileage based and we don't plan on changing them anytime soon. We will look at it again once a Spotsylvania station comes online.

Paul from Leeland Road asks:

Any chance that VRE will start selling tee shirts? I'd sport one of those. My nephew also wants a toy VRE train. Do you guys have plans for any merchandise?

VRE Management:

We do have t-shirts and other merchandise like train whistles for sale. Please send inquiries to gotrains@vre.org and we will forward them to our Marketing Manager.

Jim from Clifton asks:

One of your noble New Year's resolutions was to decide on wi-fi for the trains later in the year. I know resolutions are meant to be broken, but we are nearing the end of 2010 with no update on wi-fi. I appreciate the standard answer about the challenge related dead zones along the lines but what action are you taking to overcome this challenge?

VRE Management:

I never intended to break my New Year's resolutions, however, WiFi is much harder than I thought it would be. here is the status right now. We have full coverage on the Manassas Line and full coverage Quantico north on the Fredericksburg Line. I do not want to provide the service unless we have full coverage on both lines. Currently, we are working with Stafford County to get a cell phone tower to give us coverage from Quantico to Fredericksburg. I have to

brief the Board in October on providing WiFi service. I should have a final resolution by November.

Manassas from Manassas asks:

I wanted to thank you and your crew for stepping up to the plate and coming through all of the promises you made us last month. Job well done.

VRE Management:

I know that it is really the passengers that make VRE run and we must do our best to get you to your destinations on time.

Cliff from Burke, Va asks:

The web page notes that the newsletter is a monthly, when are you going to print the August issue as this is September?

VRE Management:

We had to skip the August issue as we were focusing all our efforts to getting the trains back on time. Look for the September issue later this month.

Jason from Rippon asks:

1) A while back, a second platform was mentioned for both Rippon and Lorton stations. Are there any plans on adding a second platform at these stations? 2) The overhang at Rippon is limited in length. During times of inclement weather, it can become crowded under the covering. Any plans to extend the covering to the length of the platform?

VRE Management:

We are still planning on adding second platforms to those stations. I have to find funding first. I will share your concerns about extending the length and width of the roof with our Director of Construction and Facilities.

Jason from Rippon asks:

3) Trains often exceed the length of the platform, causing riders to walk to the front or rear of the trains. Often through overpacked trains, making the situation uncomfortable for both the person detraining, and the people the bump into along the way. Any plans to extend the platform length needed at many of the stations?

VRE Management:

Long term, yes, we plan on lengthening platforms. However, the only platform extension we are

planning right now is at the Broad Run station. As funding becomes available, we'll extend more.

Murty from **Manassas** asks:

Great work done by VRE for bringing quickly on-time performance back to normal (99% efficiency). Congrats. to VRE and Keolis teams

VRE Management:

I am glad there are a lot of riders pleased by our efforts. We will continue to improve service.

Ross from **rippon landing** asks:

is there any chance an additional car will be added to 312? we were over-full by the time we left woodbridge this morning... we still have tourists riding with us and the fed employees are all back from summer break..

VRE Management:

I understand that ridership is growing. We had to switch sets between the last and the first train since more people ride the first express train. We'll continue to watch the numbers.

Scott from **Fredericksburg** asks:

The "north entrance" to Lorton Station is getting more and more use. I won't get into the No Trespassing sign that is perpetually ignored, but with the increase in traffic, I am witnessing more and more people running down the steep path to catch the train before the doors close and almost barrelling over people trying to climb up the hill. Somebody is going to get hurt one of these days and VRE and CSX are going to have liability problems.

VRE Management:

I will have the Safety and Security Manager as well as CSX look into this. The reality is that this area is a "No Trespassing" area for our riders' safety. Anyone choosing to ignore the sign is assuming the risk of citation or injury.

Ken from **Burke** asks:

Please keep a sign that isn't attached to the sliding doors of the quiet car to give us a clue when we're dog tired. I ask you be patient with us. With the new conductors and equipment combinations, where a train stops on the platform has been a bit erratic. Some of us tired sods in the evening don't realize how long or short the train stopped, and with the quiet car signs hidden once the door opens, it's easy to step into a quiet car without realizing it. Thanks for your patience -- and to the good folk in the quiet car with their gentle reminders.

VRE Management:

Our preference is to have several signs on the windows on each level in addition to the ones on the doors. With that said, I know it can be easy to realize that you are not on the Quiet Car. I have done it myself. Gentle reminders are always welcome.

John from Broadrun asks:

Was really having a bad day last month, lost my ticket, could not find the VRE office, missed my train and got on the Fredricksburg Line. This happens often enough that VRE make announcements between Crystal City and Alexandria. Is possible to have a prerecorded message stating that this is a "Manassas or Fredricksburg" line about 1 min before the door close in Alexandria? Also could we provide the conductors with some info on what to do if you get on the wrong train. I know it was not VRE's fault that I got on the wrong train but an answer of " I dont know what to tell you" is not helpful

VRE Management:

I will work with Keolis on announcements at Alexandria as well as educating the crews about rider options when getting on the wrong train.

VRE Management:

Another hour has flown by. Now that on-time performance has stabilized I appreciate your other comments on how we can improve. Rest assured, that even if I didn't answer your question, I still take them all into consideration. We are continuing to work with the Keolis crews about the finer details on announcements, ticket checking, and VRE policies. In the next month, we should be there. See you on October 6th.

-Dale