

Let's Talk!

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



There are currently 142 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Welcome to our monthly On-Line Forum. Glad to see all the questions! Sorry for the delay, we have experienced technical difficulties and we will extend past noon so you can get your full hour in.

Now on to the questions!

Greg from The Woo asks:

From last month's forum: "Deb from Fredericksburg, VA asks: What's with all the railroad ties piled up alongside of the Fredericksburg line tracks? VRE Management: CSX will begin a tie replacement program next week. As a result, the Fredericksburg Line might have some minor temporary slow orders." Obviously your definition of minor and mine are a little different. I have found the delays from the tie replacement and congestion delays to be more than minor.

VRE Management:

We apologize for the resulting delays. There were definitely issues on some mornings where the crews were not out of the way in time and have addressed those concerns. On a positive note, the tie gang is mostly done and slow orders should be gone next week.

Larry from Brooke asks:

Would VRE consider changing the policy for Wheel Chair Lifts...it seems like the conductors wait until all passengers are on board or have exited before using the lift...this doesn't see to be the most efficient way

VRE Management:

There is no official policy on when to board passenger who require extra assistance. I will look into making this process the most efficient for all riders.

Jay from Lorton, VA asks:

Does the priority seating include seniors to have a seat when the car is crowded?

VRE Management:

Priority seating is reserved for those with disabilities. If you find that you are in need of seating, please speak with the conductor who will try their best to accommodate you.

W from **Manassas** asks:

Wow. I've been reading the previous two month's of Let's Talk and it sure seems like a lot of people are frustrated or otherwise not happy about something. I'd like to take this opportunity to say "thank you" to VRE, Keolis and anyone else that helps get me to and from work safely everyday. Keep up the good job, keep me safe, and have a great sunny Spring Day!

VRE Management:

Thank and certainly while we get a lot of complaints on the forum, we know a lot of you are happy with our service.

Christina from **Manassas Va** asks:

Is there any talk of adding more trains or express trains? Specifically on Manassas line between 6:43am and 7:20am.

VRE Management:

No we are not adding any more trains, but we will hopefully be adding two cars to 326 and 329 plus reduce the Step-Up so Amtrak Trains 171 & 176 will be less expensive for Manassas and Burke Centre riders. They act as an express train.

W from **Manassas** asks:

Which conductor is the senior conductor for a train set? The one near the locomotive or the one at the other end?

VRE Management:

Each crew decides for themselves where each conductor will be located. As the senior person the conductor usually gets preference so that may change from train to train.

Stinky329 from **Manassas, VA** asks:

Why do they dump the bathroom as soon as it gets to the station. It really smells up the station. This is for both lines. It usually happens at L'Enfant.

VRE Management:

The effluent is supposed to be processed through a system. The system is designed to discharge non-odorous environmentally approved liquid onto the tracks. While this may sound gross, it is

the industry standard. However, there should not be an odor and I am working to get that corrected.

David from **Woodbridge** asks:

Can the 305 train departing time be moved back to the 4:05pm original time?

VRE Management:

Train #305 was changed to accomodate a state-sponsored Amtrak train. I do not foresee this schedule in the near future.

Dave from **Woodbridge, Va** asks:

Can you please add an additional car to the 300 Express train? This train has been very crowded since it started in July and is even more crowded now.

VRE Management:

Hopefully I will be able to add another car to #300 soon.

Gary from **Rippon** asks:

What's with the constant freight congestion causing delays on Friday mornings for 300 and 302...recently we had to wait for 5 freight trains to go by before VRE got a chance.

VRE Management:

With the tie replacement work going on, there was considerable congestion overnight. These delays should go away at the end of this week.

Mike from **Bristow, VA** asks:

Do you have an exact date of when wireless will be available on all trains (AM and PM)?

VRE Management:

Not an exact date. I have to get approval from the board first to put out a bid first, which will happen this summer, and then the bid has to go out. At this juncture, I would say by late 2011, early 2012.

Mark from **Lorton, VA** asks:

Why does Amtrak go so much faster than VRE and doesn't get delayed like VRE was this

morning? VRE should be in front of Amtrak. It is more important for us to be on time to work than Amtrak

VRE Management:

With the recent track work, slow orders are put in place where the track was most recently affected. An Amtrak train travelling on the adjacent track may not have the same speed restrictions that any train on the track VRE uses may have.

John from Burke, VA asks:

Now that the parking lot at Broad Run is expanded when will more handicap parking places be added? Is the current number in compliance with the ADA? The current number of handicap parking places are filled before the 6:40am departure most days forcing some of us that can't walk well to park in the far reaches of the parking lot in tight spaces.

VRE Management:

Parking is at a premium and spaces filling up for early train is an issue for all riders at all stations. That said, we are compliant with the number of parking spaces at Broad Run that are ADA accessible.

Matt from VA asks:

Will the 335 train receive new cars?

VRE Management:

At this point, the legacy cars will stay with Train #335.

Donna from Manassas Park, VA asks:

Hi Dale, Saw the movie Unstoppable and wondered what would VRE do in the event of an uncontrollable train loose on the tracks. Would we be able to pull off to a side track, like in the movie? I do realize this is Hollywood, but it did make me think a little. Oh and I am very pleased with service. You have really improved in the breakdown area. Kudos! If only my car was as reliable!

VRE Management:

I saw that movie, too. And Hollywood certainly has a way of making anything possible. The railroad industry has many safeguards to prevent these types of incidents occurring. Most if not all systems are designed to fail safe and stop the train.

Ross from rippon landing asks:

it's early april and already the tourists have re-appeared on 312.. we were standing room only before woodbridge... what is the status of returning the fourth car to this train?

VRE Management:

Hopefully we will add another car shortly.

Farepayer from Manassas Park asks:

I'd like to compliment most of the KEOLIS Conductors. By and large, they're pleasant and professional. There's one glaring exception, but we don't see her name. She doesn't need a nametag or photo badge. If I have to have my ticket out at all times (her favorite speech), should conductors be required to display their badges? It's hard to complain about the mystery conductor. So much for zero tolerance. It's a one way pattern. The last three trains I've seen her on, she's been anonymous. Who's the supervision?

VRE Management:

Please send an email to gotrains@vre.org indicating what train this is happening on and I will look into it.

Stanley from Stafford, VA asks:

If there is Government furlough, will VRE continue to operate?

VRE Management:

VRE will operate at full schedule next week no matter what.

Leigh from Fairfax VA asks:

Why can't crews learn to stop trains at the same, or approximate, platform position every day? 328 ANNOYS riders by stopping a full car length out of position at L'Enfant every other day!

VRE Management:

I have been looking into markers on the platforms to help engineers stop in the same place everyday. Until we have all the our new locomotives in place, it may still be a little different by train because of the difference in locomotive lengths.

John from Manassas Park, VA asks:

I'm hoping that some day something will be done about the people with trucks parking so their bed is extending over the sidewalk (this happens with many cars also), some have trailer hitches that would be perfect for snagging an ankle. Can we get Manassas Park Police out there to ticket these folks who care more about their parking than making the sidewalk accessible?

VRE Management:

I understand your concerns, but there is no ordinance that prevents this type of behavior. I am afraid there is not much I can do about it. We will issue some courtesy announcements.

Cynthia from **Woodbridge, VA** asks:

At the beginning of April I bought a monthly ticket. If the government shuts down and I am unable to use my monthly ticket will I be able to receive a credit towards my May ticket?

VRE Management:

This is a tricky situation especially with the transit benefits. I'll be happy to take a look at this once we know how long the possible shutdown will be.

James from **Manassas, VA** asks:

I definitely commend you on the improvement of service over the past few months. Keep up the good work! Not to jinx what I just said, but as the new engines arrive, how about taking the old engine and doubling it up with another old engine so there is two running on a single train? The example I have is Manassas Line #328 and #331. Always good to have back-up! Thank you.

VRE Management:

Thanks for the compliment. As the new engines arrive, 6 are in service today, we remove the least reliable engines from service. Because of the service of mid-day storage space downtown, we cannot double up engines. Overall reliability increases as we add new locomotives and remove poor performers.

Trish from **Woodbridge, VA** asks:

What is the latest news about the reduction in the \$10 Step-Up to Amtrak fare?

VRE Management:

Effective May 2nd, the Step-Up fare for all Amtrak trains shown in our schedule.

dave from **Richmond VA** asks:

Will the meet the management be ready for the 3:35 VRE riders today?

VRE Management:

They better be. I'll be over a little later.

Darla from Broad Run VA asks:

When are you going to fix the flat panel at Manassas station? It has been out of service for MONTHS!

VRE Management:

I thought it was fixed, let me look into it.

leo from Manassas VA asks:

can you add more trains to your schedule? Usually the last train leave Broad run around 7:30 AM. Some of us work flexible hours (10 AM to 6 PM). There are no trains past 7:30. Also, are you doing something to ease the overcrowd trains? Please add more cars to the 329 afternoon train.

VRE Management:

I would love to run more trains and add more cars to the existing trains. Storage and funding is an issue. Adding more cars is first on the list. I anticipate adding more cars to 329 soon.

Manassas from Manassas, VA asks:

Hi Dale.. 329 train is packed like sardines.. how soon until you will be able to implement any plans you have mentioned in the past Forum's? It is getting ugly... Passengers are standing by the time the train leaves L'Enfant.

VRE Management:

Hopefully we will add two cars to 329 in the next few weeks.

Manassas from Manassas asks:

I hope you take into consideration the compliments that are posted on this forum when it comes to giving out bonus's because Ellen does deserve a nice fat bonus. She is efficient and kind. Ellen always gives 110%. Ellen handles the many stresses that being a conductor requires with ease. Don't know how you found her for this job but she is simply perfect for it. Thanks for stepping up the courtesy announcements on the train... I do think they help.

VRE Management:

I've gotten many compliments about Ellen, I will be sure to forward this along.

Heather Hemdal from Burke VA asks:

Will the trains run if there is a Gov't shutdown? I still need to come to work so I'm trying to figure out what transportation will look like.

VRE Management:

Trains will still run even if the federal government shuts down. Operating budgets come from local jurisdictions and fare revenue. As long as that is stable, we can run trains.

trey from stafford asks:

just wanted to point out how good of a job that Aaron doing on train #302

VRE Management:

Since Ellen got her kudos, I need to make sure Aaron gets his as well.

Ralph from Fredericksburg asks:

Has an infrastructure study been completed as to how much it would cost to expand all platforms on the Fredericksburg line to accomodate all of the doors opening. This does not seem to be tons of money. This would save on dwell time as well as diesel fuel from ideling for extended periods of time as people trip thier way through the cars trying to find an open door.

VRE Management:

We have this in mind for all stations and since there is not one lump sum given to us to get it all done at one time, the piece meal approach is the only way to go about it. Broad Run is next on the list to get a platform extension.

Tom from Leeland asks:

Why not eliminate the afternoon train and have it run at 3:20 instead of 1250. This could be your express train going south!

VRE Management:

Riders like the flexibility to leave their jobs at mid-day should they have an emergency. This actually entices more people to use our service.

Dave from Kingstowne asks:

What will rising fuel prices do VRE fares? At what level are fare's likely to increase? Are you fuel costs under fixed contracts or otherwise hedged?

VRE Management:

We currently hedge fuel contracts. I don't anticipate fares raising for the next six months at least.

After that, it largely depends on how high fuel prices go. Currently for our new budget that starts July 1st, there is no fare increase.

Will from **LORTON** asks:

Usually board at Lorton but often at Franconia as well. Any plans to lengthen the Metro side platform. Seems like we are stopping there more often and it's always a mess getting off especially when the trains are already SRO. I never know which end to board as some conductors have stopped the 1st cars, the middle cars or the last cars. Doesn't seem to be consistent.

VRE Management:

I will work on getting consistency on which cars platform on the Metro side. As for lengthening that short platform, no plans at this time.

Aaron from **Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

Is there anyway to take Woodbridge off the Express train? It would eliminate a lot of the crowding seen on the first train.

VRE Management:

No, but we will hopefully add a car to that train.

Abe from **Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

Can we have quarterly tickets?

VRE Management:

I have heard this question again and again as many workers get their transportation benefits quarterly. It is something we can look into as we start the process of replacing the fare collection equipment.

Kate from **Fredericksburg** asks:

I take the express train so I can get to work on time, with all the lateness of the train these days I may have to go back to driving. What can you guys do about all of these problems, it seems that if it's not the CSX issues, it's always something.

VRE Management:

By in large, on-time performance on the CSX had improved considerably in February the Fredericksburg Line was well over 90% on-time. The track work in March has caused many of the delays either because of the track work and speed restrictions or train congestion. I am

confident that when the track work ends later this week, you will see it return to our improved on-time performance.

Carter from Lorton, VA asks:

Is CSX doing track work at L'Enfant Plaza? I see ties laying around

VRE Management:

Yes. CSX is performing some additional tie replacement north of the Potomac River. While some is occurring at the L'Enfant station, much of it is occurring north of us.

Paul from King George, VA asks:

I understand that there are plans to increase the number of available parking spaces at Leeland Station. Is VRE looking into better ways to manage traffic into and out of the station like adding a second entrance/exit on Leeland Road? In terms of management of foot traffic, is there any consideration of an additional platform entrance to help mitigate the bottle-neck that forms at the only platform exit each and every afternoon? Easing the flow of passengers exiting the platform in the afternoon may also have the effect of easing parking lot congestion.

VRE Management:

We will go out soon with request for bids to increase the parking at Brooke and Leeland by 200 spaces each. At Leeland, as a part of the parking project, we will look at providing more access points to platform. They are going to widen the entrance to Leeland Road to allow for separate left and right turn lanes.

DEB from Spotsy asks:

Can we get the pot holes filled in at the Fredericksburg parking lots? The one exit by Moca Moes and the motorcycle parking spaces is really bad and the one at the top of the hill needs some work also. Thank you!

VRE Management:

I'll look into this to see if we can have the lot re-graveled.

Mark from Burke, VA asks:

Yesterday's Train Talk article about queueing seemed to represent a change in policy. Previously, passengers were told not to get up until the train had departed the station prior to their destination. This article, however, said to stay seated until the train stops at your destination. I'm sorry, but that just isn't practical. If I get up (from an upper deck seat) before my

destination, I can ask the person sitting on the stairs to move into the seat I just vacated. By waiting until the train stops, I risk not being able to get off the train before it departs.

VRE Management:

You do have a point, Mark. I am working with Keolis on a queuing policy which should help.

Tom from Manassas, VA asks:

We seem to be having a spurt of mechanical difficulties all of a sudden, between malfunctioning APUs and track switches, it's become a seasonal "tradition". The former problems went away when the new locomotives appeared; now we see the clunkers return and the associated failures. What sort of regular preventive maintenance is done on the systems to preclude these issues?

VRE Management:

We have seen a significant decrease in our train equipment delays since last year and as we receive new locomotives. Issues with trains as well as track equipment will always be an issue. No system is 100% fail proof. We do, however, work to minimize the delays as much as possible when they do happen.

Steve from Burke, VA asks:

Dale, Trains have been running well in March, please keep it going! Can additional one-way signs be put up on the first level of the Burke Center garage? People go the wrong way (against the "wrong way" signs) on the first level and create a traffic jam. If everyone exited as the garage as signed, traffic would move smoother for all drivers.

VRE Management:

I'll talk to Fairfax County and see if this is possible.

Jeff from Broad Run asks:

Must the engineer for train 322 blow the whistle when departing L'Enfant? The exit at the north entrance of the platform is right next to the cab car. Should I start training myself to not jump at the loud noise each morning?

VRE Management:

The engineer is required to blow the whistle when departing stations.

Dan from Haymarket VA asks:

What's the status of the Wifi effort?

VRE Management:

You can't always get what you want but you find sometimes you get what need.

VRE Management:

Sorry about that. Technical difficulties again. I actually have a better answer to the WiFi question.

VRE Management:

Because of the increasing ridership, my priorities have shifted to buying more railcars and more parking spaces such that WiFi has taken lower priority. Having said that, I will determine this summer, if we had sufficient funding to install WiFi on all train. I have made the decision it must be available to all cars to all riders. I will not do a partial installation. In a perfect world, I would be able to accomplish all of this, but unfortunately, I have to pick and choose.

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Tom from Manassas, VA asks:

Every day when waiting at L'Enfant for 327 to arrive, the Fredericksburg train barrels in with a conductor hanging out the door. As there are no safety harnesses or the like available, this seems to be a huge safety issue. Can this be addressed?

VRE Management:

I will look into the practice.

Laura from Stafford, VA asks:

I would like to know why the conductors, mainly on the afternoon trains, feel the need to hit the "suggestion" messages with the ridiculous voice that gives riders "hints" on how to act. There is no place to sit, no place to stand, people are sitting on steps, and we have to hear that stupid message, with the ridiculous voice, telling us to put our rear on the seats? Do they think, based on the money we spend for passes, we want to stand or sit on steps???? I'm tired of hearing

insulting messages when there is no place to move!! If you don't want us in the aisles...GET MORE TRAINS!!

VRE Management:

We ask that the conductors don't make such announcements when the trains are Standing Room Only. I will continue to work with them on this.

Bob from Quantico, VA asks:

Do you ever expect to resume having the Fredricksburg line trains run on-time? There's been at least one train a day for the past several months that hasn't been on-time. This is becoming a major concern for riders. We cannot count on VRE to provide a timely service, it's obvious. This in turn can cause people to lose their jobs. Something needs to be done ASAP! Enough with the CSX tie replacement crap.

VRE Management:

If CSX didn't replace the ties, they would rot, and lead to even more significant delays, as our operating speeds would be reduced. These delays are necessary to maintain a properly running railroad. The good news is that the work is almost done and we shouldn't be affected by this project by next week.

Queuer from Fredericksburg asks:

There is a lot posted about queuing. I queue because there are cretins trying to get off first with cigarette in hand and I don't want to breathe their cancerous smoke. My health is more important than the queuing concerns of VRE. Also stubborn invalids queue up and block egress. Why not get in front of them so you can make your connections? When you solve the first two I'll sit again.

VRE Management:

With ridership at record levels, trains are more packed than ever, and nerves ever more irritated. All I can ask is for riders to be aware of their surroundings and treat others with the same respect they want to be treated with. Referring to fellow riders as cretins and invalids doesn't foster that level of respect.

Bob from Woodbridge asks:

Spoke to a new rider on Monday morning who had bought a ticket on Saturday and inadvertently let the TVM validate his ticket as it printed. Maybe it's not a big problem, but perhaps the machines could be programmed to prevent validations on Saturday and Sunday when there's no service?

VRE Management:

I will have our Fare Operations Manager look into it.

RK from FFX VA asks:

What is the real policy on how the conductors should treat FRCs? I've had them stay 'as-is', ripped or taken away. My problem is that the FRC as with any monthly, single trip, 10 trip 5 day ticket is used as a valid 'transfer' on a Metro Bus to get me to my final destination. If it is taken from me, then I have lost my 'transfer'. I've seen this question before but the policy was 'forthcoming'. I've inquired at "gotrains@vre.org" twice with no response. Appreciate the answer!

VRE Management:

Conductors are supposed to just tear now. Our staff of 3 who respond to emails, on top of their other duties, have had a lot to answer lately, but I will make sure they are getting out their responses quicker.

Peter from Fairfax, VA asks:

What about having one or two more cars reserved as quiet cars on each train? It seems that the rude and loud conversations and phone calls is getting worse. By having one or more Quiet cars added to trains would be really helpful to allow us to avoid these nuisance distractions. One car that I normally get on has a group of folks who love to socialize the entire trip. It gets really distracting. Thanks

VRE Management:

We will continue to remind riders that not everyone wants to hear loud cell phone conversations even though it is not the quiet car. Increasing the number of Quiet Cars is not something we have planned, though.

Ann from Bristow asks:

This would be a courtesy request for passengers. Some people are allergic to scents. Please keep this in mind when applying perfumes, colognes, after shave, scented creams, etc. We are riding in contained vehicles, and these scents can be overwhelming to those with allergies.

VRE Management:

Another courtesy reminder from a fellow rider.

Bob from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Until we can get the full sized, seat-hogs removed from the train, can you please have conductors

ENFORCE the bicycle policies on the morning trains?! There are 2 riders that consistently ride 308 in the morning. One doesn't board in the correct car and the other pushes his way on in the middle of all the other riders, often hitting people with his wheels and/or pedals instead of waiting to board LAST as stated in YOUR policy...isn't this something conductors should KNOW and say something about??

VRE Management:

I will follow up on it.

Leeland Gal from **Leeland Rd VA** asks:

VRE thank you for sending out the Train Talk email about the problem with queuing on the trains. On Friday, April 1, 2011 on train 305, a Leeland Rd passenger was unable to exit the train because the Fredericksburg station riders were lined up blocking the door to exit the train. As a result he made an unexpected trip to Fredericksburg. I am asking my fellow passengers to show some courtesy to each other. If the train is not at your station stay in your seat, don't stand in the doorways or the vestibules. Let the Leeland Rd riders get off the train. Thank you.

VRE Management:

Queuing courtesy request, courtesy of a fellow rider.

dave from **manassas** asks:

Have you found a buyer for the older VRE locomotives?

VRE Management:

The army is purchasing three and Motive Power, the company building our new ones, are buying ten old locomotives.

VRE Management:

Well that was an exciting hour plus. as you may have observed, we had website, that caused the sporadic nature of our responses. Hopefully it will not happen again as it has not happened in many years.

There were a lot of questions about the government shutdown. I want to stress that VRE will operate full regular service on Monday and intend to keep it that way. Thanks for all your questions.

We'll see you at Meet the Management later this afternoon and through the rest of this month. Otherwise see you online again on May 4th!

-Dale