

Let's Talk!

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



There are currently 95 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Happy New Year, thanks for joining us. Looking forward to an exciting year with 20 new locomotives coming. 2nd one is on the property and after initial tests will be operating service. You will be seeing more and more of the new locomotives in service. And as promised, joining me today is Scott Treece, Keolis Transportation Manager for the Manassas Line.

Monica from Haymarket, VA asks:

Seriously, when are the problems on the Manassa line going to be addressed in a meaningful way? After being trapped on-board again this morning, 12/29 (train 332 was stuck behind 330), I am beyond frustrated with the quality of service (or lack thereof to be more precise).

VRE Management:

I understand and feel your frustration. Our main focus right now is to reduce mechanical delays as much as possible with rigorous inspections of equipment and continued training for all crews.

Clyde from Manassas asks:

Two questions: One, when are the old passenger cars on 324 going to be rotated out for the newer cars? Two, What is being done to address the over crowding on the afternoon Manassas line trains?

VRE Management:

The legacy cars will stay on 324 for some time. I am looking into purchasing new Gallery cars this year.

William from King George, VA asks:

Can the conductors please announce which side they will be arriving at Franconia Springfield. This used to be common practice under the old regime. 3 times in the past month we have had to dash from one platform to the other because the train arrived unannounced on 3 track.

VRE Management:

I will make sure we make proper announcements.

Neil from Warrenton Va asks:

VRE claims they are concerned with passenger safety, yet people are allowed to stand and sit in the vestibules so they can be the first off the car at their stop. The conductors do not try to clear the vestibules and the new riders do not care if they block passengers from egress. Why was this considered a safety issue when Amtrack operated the trains and now its not?

VRE Management:

It is still a safety concern but more passengers have been riding our trains since Keolis took over. I will work with the conductors to ensure they are enforcing the policy and continue to make announcements to educate the riders.

Brian from Manassas asks:

Happy New Year! I've heard rumors that there maybe some extra trains added to the Manassas line. Is there any truth to this? Will you be soliciting inputs from riders? Thanks.

VRE Management:

I had been looking into a lot of options to increase mid-day storage and add capacity to some of our more crowded trains. Taking a train and returning to Broad Run in the morning was one of those options and I am still working on a good solution.

Standing from Bristow, VA asks:

When are you going to add more cars to the Manassas line trains??? Trains 326 and 329 are jammed full --- barely even any standing room. Why don't you join us for a ride one evening on the 329? Make sure you board at Crystal City so you don't get a seat!

VRE Management:

I have ridden 329 and am acutely aware of the problem. I had to stand until Burke Centre. I am trying very hard to add two cars to this train. It will take a lot more work on our part to make it happen.

Mike from Spotsytlucky asks:

Is it just me, ior does it seem that when you have a mechanical problem, most of the time multiple or compound problems arise. This would seem to indicate a common maintenance issue on the day(s) in question. Any effort at/success in isolating said factors? Or am I barking up the wrong tree?

VRE Management:

Usually catastrophic failure is a combination of events. When a train breaks down in the middle of rush hour, it will affect all of the trains following, making it seem that more trains are affected by mechanical delays than really are.

Nathan from Burke VA asks:

What is the schedule for the delivery of new locomotives? In particular, how many new would be added to the Manassas line in 2011? Currently I see only one new locomotive. I am eager to see the new engines as this will minimize most of the recent delays on otherwise a wonderful service!!

VRE Management:

We received our second locomotive last Thursday. Hopefully it will be in service by the end of the week (V51). The third locomotive (V52) should be here by this weekend and should be in service by the end of next week. We are scheduled to receive a locomotive every two weeks until the end of July when all the new locomotives will be on the property. And by the end of May, all revenue trains will have a new locomotive on it.

Nancy from Alexandria VA asks:

Has the policy changed concerning step boxes at Alexandria? Particularly on the 333, conductors have not been setting out the step boxes on the northern-most car. This has happened quite often with different conductors. Does Keolis simply not care??

VRE Management:

Scott says Nancy, no, the policy has not changed it is standard policy that stepboxes will be placed at Alexandria. I will follow up to make sure this takes place.

Doug from Burke, VA asks:

Dear Dale and Scott--I've had experience with other commuter train lines and VRE is the best. Your extra efforts, attention to detail, and real commitment to taking care of your customers shows. It is a great feeling to ride VRE because I have confidence you guys and others on your team are on the job! Sincerely, doug

VRE Management:

Scott says thank you for the kind words.

M from VA asks:

When do you think Wi-Fi will be available and what will the cost be?

VRE Management:

Hopefully by late spring, at least two cars on every train will have WiFi. Currently the plan is for the service to be free to riders.

Leigh from Broad Run asks:

It's great that they have the new parking lot at Broad Run. However, when and where are they going to make it accessible for walking? It's not fun jumping in the muddy or frozen ditch!

VRE Management:

I know that Prince William is working on some finishing touches and I will see if they can add some pedestrian walkways through the grassy medium.

Monica from Spotsylvania, VA asks:

The parking at the Fredericksburg VRE parking lot has maxed out! What is the timetable for the Spotsylvania station to be opened? Thank you.

VRE Management:

Right now we have to finish the final design and create a third mainline track to Spotsylvania. Hopefully that will be complete in two to three years. The earliest possible that the station could be complete is two years.

Mark from Manassas, VA asks:

My question is regarding the Broad Run platform extension. Will they also add an additional ramp leading to the parking lot? Currently there is only one walkway that leads from the platform to the parking lot and it creates a bottleneck leaving the platform.

VRE Management:

I will look at the design to see if there is an additional ramp. I know when we design a garage for Broad Run, there will be additional ramps leading into the garage.

Tom from Fairfax, VA asks:

Aside from the reality that 'freight' trumps 'passengers' are there different standards for Amtrak, CSX, VRE when it comes to signal issues or speed restrictions? Have been passed by freight trains during "speed restrictions" and have seen trains move at speed thru areas with alleged signal issues.. thanks

VRE Management:

When the speed restriction is track related all trains on that track are affected. Keep in mind

when there are multiple tracks a restriction may exist on one track but not the other. Flash Flood restrictions significantly reduce the speed of passenger trains more than freight trains.

Phil from Manassas Line -- Rolling Rd asks:

The lights, at the bottom of the stairs, all along the sidewalk at Rolling Road are not functioning. This is a safety issue. Who should be notified?

VRE Management:

We are aware that the lights have been out. Our Facilities Superintendent has been in contact with Fairfax County. Since it has not been resolved, I will get in contact with them.

Mike from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Is there any discussion of having an earlier Fredericksburg line train than the 0505, that would depart FRED NLT 0410?

VRE Management:

I do not see this happening in the near future.

Bill from Burke Va asks:

Is there any possibility to run a later train for the Manassas line out of Union Station? It would be nice if you could run a 7:50 train so that I can work later at my new job.

VRE Management:

We are always looking for possibilities of expansion, including running later trains. Funding is always the main obstacle but we are looking for creative ways to get it done.

Tammy from Manassas, VA asks:

Is there any way that a person in a wheelchair can get on and off the train first, rather than last? I think it would make the process a bit quicker. Thanks.

VRE Management:

This is an area that Keolis is pursuing but we also need to re-educate our able-bodied passengers to use the opposite side so that we can accommodate those with special needs at the same time others are boarding.

Big D from Woodbridge asks:

Would it be possible to take one of the cars from the 302 train and add it to the 300 Express in the morning? The 300 train has remained popular with riders so space is limited.

VRE Management:

We assign the number of cars to a train based on several factors. One is how the trains will fit into our mid-day storage yard, another is ridership, and a third component is the ridership on that same trainset in the afternoon. Many of our trains are crowded and I am working to increase the capacity in the next few months.

Mark from Leeland asks:

Are pamphlet pushers who leave useless fliers on cars in your commuter lots ever fined for littering or trespassing?

VRE Management:

We cannot fine them, however; when riders bring to our attention that flyers have been left on their cars. We do call the companies that left them to tell them to refrain from putting flyers on in the future. Most companies follow this request as we never see second offenders. Please send an email to gotrains@vre.org when you see this happen.

Rick from Stafford, VA asks:

Happy New Year! Well with another year behind us and all of the growing pains that came with the switch over from Amtrak to Keolis operations - I need to say bravo! Bravo for the insight and good decision in getting an operating crew that actually gives a darn about its job and its passengers. On time performance, to me at least, has jumped tremendously, since you brought Keolis aboard. Now if we can do something more about those CSX screw ups and the bottlenecks caused by the always late Amtrak trains.

VRE Management:

Thanks for the compliments, Rick! I am glad you feel that way, but I am always looking for ways to improve service, including working with CSX and Amtrak to improve reliability for all parties.

Mark from Manassas Park, VA asks:

What is the status of the Alexandria Bridge Project to improve the use of the second platform?

VRE Management:

I think I have full funding for this project. i will know in a month. It is actually a tunnel that will be built from the station to the Metrorail station and will allow access from the middle platform as well as for ADA passengers with elevators. I anticipate it will take two to three years.

bumpy from **manassas park, va** asks:

Last summer you mentioned that ideas for filling the large potholes in the manassas park parking lot were being looked into. Since several of the potholes are getting larger, do you have any updates on this information?

VRE Management:

I'll try to get them filled as quickly as I can.

Jim Thompson from **Bristow, Va.** asks:

I was parked at Broad Run Station in Mannasas (Dec 2010) and when I returned to my vehicle, Somebody had cut my catalytic converter out of my muffler system. When I filed a police report the Police told me there is no camera surveillance on your lot. This is costing me \$1,400.00 to replace. What is VRE going to do about these thefts and my expenses?

VRE Management:

I am sorry to hear that. While theft and vandalism are rare at our lots, it does happen, and catalytic converters are popular targets due to the value and little time it takes to cut. In the past we have suggested to have bolts welded shut and buy a protective sleeve for it. Since we depend on local jurisdictions for surveillance of our lots, we track trends and work with local police departments to curb theft.

Kevin from **Manassas, VA** asks:

Have you considered adding a text messaging option for reporting train delays? Accessing e-mail first thing in the morning is not always convenient.

VRE Management:

This option is already available. When adding a contact, choose "mobile" as the contact type and select your service provider and then follow the instructions. If you need further help feel free to call 703-684-1001 or email gotrains@vre.org.

Bill from **Rolling Rd** asks:

Dale - we really appreciate all your communication and updates, but I feel there is one piece missing. What is your plan and strategy to fix the engine breakdowns? We've heard a lot about "meetings" with various parties, but "meetings" is what the government does in the absence of any strategy. Besides praying to the railroad gods and waiting for the new equipment to arrive, what is your action plan, timeline and strategy? Thanks for all your efforts.

VRE Management:

I know there is a lot of frustrated people especially on the Manassas Line right now for the long delays experienced in November and December. I don't have long meetings on this subject but I will tell you what I have done. We have brought in five locomotive experts to make repairs on locomotives. We've had two audits/surveys of our mechanical operation. I have the reports and we are making changes as to how we do a lot of the business. Supervisors are well aware of the issue and are overseeing the maintenance operation much more closely. New locomotives will help the situation but ultimately I have to ensure that our maintenance process and procedures are sound and being carried out properly.

Anne from Springfield asks:

I purchased my monthly pass from the Gray Bus Co. in DC. On 12/31, I tried to purchase my monthly and was turned away because Gray decided not to sell ANY VRE tickets, even though Gray was open for business. I was sick on 1/3, the last day Dec. monthly passes would be honored. On 1/4, I tried to buy my monthly and the credit card machine was down! I had to go to an ATM machine to cash and then submit a claim form for reimbursement (versus facing a \$150 citation for something clearly not my fault). Basic customer service at Gray really needs to improve.

VRE Management:

We recognize that this is an issue. Please send an email to gotrains@vre.org so we can ask you some specific questions so we can help our Gray Line Vendor to get back on track.

Ashwin Kumar from Springfield, VA asks:

What good are FRCs when you're on a monthly pass ?? Why can't VRE hand out coupons instead of FRCs (monetary value = \$6.60) ? I think it's totally unfair for monthly pass holders to miss out on FRCs.

VRE Management:

I know that FRCs do not give monthly ticket holders a feeling of instant gratification like it does for our ten-trip riders. My best suggestion is to hold on to your FRCs for a month when you have vacation or out of town business that will prevent you from riding everyday. Then you can use the FRCs in conjunction with the ten-trip tickets that may be more cost effective for that month.

Elder from Rappahannock VA asks:

Are some seats supposed to be reserved for disabled and elderly? What is the VRE definition of elderly? How do older passengers obtain priority seating?

VRE Management:

We do have priority seating primarily for our passengers with disabilities. If you need a seat on a crowded train, please speak with a conductor that can help find you one.

Greg from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Is there a reason that every Friday VRE train 303 is late leaving the yard and getting to the Platform @ Union Station? It seems that we must always wait for an Amtrak train to move, even when there are open tracks.

VRE Management:

I am not aware of a recurring problem on Fridays. Union Station becomes easily congested whenever late trains are coming off the Northeast Corridor, as exhibited when the Christmas blizzard hit the northeast.

Jharmekia Curtis from Henrico, VA asks:

Are there any plans on renovating the Fredericksburg parking lot or constructing a parking deck and adding lighting. It is a huge safety concern to walk blocks to the Station at 5:00am with unlighted streets.

VRE Management:

The VRE board member from Fredericksburg has asked me to look into the parking situation at Fredericksburg to see if anything can be done. I will look into this issue this month.

Greg from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Why does some Engineers still have such a big problem getting the aligned correctly when stopping at stations? Several times I have been on am and pm trains where engineers either completely missed a stop or missed most of it and had to back up. 302, 303, and 305 are the trains.

VRE Management:

The instances of this happening have gone down, but it still happens. Even seasoned Amtrak engineers occasionally missed the mark. Please send specifics of when this happens to gotrains@vre.org so we can follow up.

Day at a time from Manassas asks:

Dale, there is a particular conductor that is always kind and professional. Her name is Ellen. She always keeps us informed of any issues quickly and continues to keep the train running smoothly

(as best she can). She has done a very good job. Just thought you would like to know you have a shining star on your staff.

VRE Management:

Scott says thank you, I will pass on your compliments to her. She is a valuable member to our team.

Steve from Burke asks:

Unfortunately, in recent months I noticed a significant decrease in the timeliness and accuracy of your email service updates. There have been several instances when there was no update when I would have thought an email would have helped (trains delayed 20 mins). In other cases, the lag time in issuing the email has been too long to allow passengers to adjust their schedule or find alternative means of getting to work/home. While you work to improve VRE's poor on-time rate, prompt email notification would be appreciated. What is your strategy for improvement?

VRE Management:

We have been working with our service provider for our Train Talk service about this issue. Text messages to phones get through pretty quickly, however, emails get held up by certain servers since our bulk messages look like spam. Our service providers work with companies like Yahoo! to make sure our messages don't get delayed. With all the domain names out there, it is hard to for them to address them all. Another alternative is to watch our Twitter feed as it reliably updates as soon as we send the messages out.

Larry from Fredericksburg asks:

Dale, you have said several times on this forum that we all would "share the misery" in dealing with the old legacy cars and that they would be moved around from train to train or line to line. Train 300 has dealt with the old cars for a LONG time. Are you going to stick to your word and shift the cars or not? I e-mailed Go Trains and got the standard canned response which didn't address your promise at all. Thanks.

VRE Management:

As answered in an earlier email. Car switching is tricky business but I will see what I can do it about it. Incidentally, the older cars were put on this train because they have more seats.

Lori from Freezing at Burke asks:

While we have avoided snow this winter, it's been particularly cold on the platform this year, especially with the frequent delays we've seen recently. Has VRE/FFX County ever considered installing heat lamps on some of platforms? It can't be very expensive and it wouldn't be hard to get ad sponsorships to cover your costs. Maybe replace those useless TV monitors with heat lamps? Just a thought...

VRE Management:

I have heard this suggestion before but it would be pretty costly to put at all stations, especially since they would only be used a few months out of the year. My main focus is to improve service, once I am comfortable with that; I will look at the amenities of our service.

Mike from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Do we really need to sign the monthly ticket? What real purpose does it serve? If it is lost there is minimal chance of reading a signature or getting it back. Are you really going to give citations for a monthly pass not being signed? Why do I need to hear about it every five minutes on the way in? This is a stupid rule that doesn't benefit the VRE or its users.

VRE Management:

A monthly ticket is only valid once your name is printed on the back. Also, since they are non-transferrable, conductors may check your ID to make sure the ticket does not belong to someone else.

Monica from Manassas asks:

As a 5 year VRE rider I consider myself valued and loyal customer. I want to convey some concerns regarding recent changes to the new Keolis staff members that prepare to be unprofessional. I want to ask that they are provided proper training on sexual harassment. I am tired of the men staring at my chest and legs and making comments. I find this very offensive and will seek other means of transportation if this continues.

VRE Management:

This is a very serious matter. Please call April, our Director of Operations, so she can work on this for you. 704-684-1001.

Larry from Woodbridge VA asks:

I have asked before about the status of the Kiss and Ride entrance to the bridge at Woodbridge. Is there any progress, and if not, why would VRE invest in this structure if agreement had not been reached that Woodbridge City would approve its use?

VRE Management:

We have submitted a design to VDOT for approval. Once it is approved, we will build the Kiss-and-Ride. I want to let you know that VDOT is not enamored with this project and we are working with Prince William County to get create a design they will accept. I should know more in two months.

Boris from Triangle VA asks:

1) Why has the 306 train (6.30am at Quantico) been shortened by one car since Monday - without any previous notice -or at least not that I have seen or heard of? - The result is an overpacked train from Quantico and most of the people standing from there to Crystal City.../ I know, better standing on the VRE than slogging on the I-95 (-:) 2) Old issue just FYI. Last year I sent an e-mail from the VRE site to the lost and found (forgot an umbrella on train - I described the train number, car, exact seat, etc.. - I never got any answer to that e-mail and I feel lucky I just forgot an umbrella.

VRE Management:

306 has had 6 cars since Monday, which is the normal consist. However, after New Years we tend to see a jump in ridership, which may make it more crowded. As for your umbrella, please call into our office at 703-684-1001 to see if we have it.

Sarah from Haymarket VA asks:

Why don't the conductors hand out FRC's on board the train anymore (at least on the Manassas line)? Requiring us to submit the form is unnecessarily time consuming.

VRE Management:

I am working with Keolis on this issue. The best option is not to be late, but if we are late, FRCs need to be handed out at the time of the delay.

John from Viewtown, Va asks:

Are you planning to add dining cars? Would be nice to get breakfast on the train!

VRE Management:

No dining cars at this time, I am trying to add as many seats as possible first.

Broke from Lorton asks:

Have there been any discussions about charging a fee to park at the Lorton VRE station?

VRE Management:

No, Fairfax does not charge parking at transit lots.

John from Viewtown Va. asks:

When does free Wi-Fi start on the trains?

VRE Management:

Hopefully we can get WiFi on at least two cars of every train by the spring.

Dawn from Burke VA asks:

why were no announcements made on train morning 324 train on 1/4/11? No conductor announcements no automated announcements. There are many new people riding the train and are not familiar with the station stops.

VRE Management:

Thanks for letting me know, Dawn. Scott Treece, Keolis Manassas Transportation Manager is here with me today. He will look into it.

Paul from Burke asks:

How are you coming with the "stop lines" that you promised in a previous forum to review? Very frustrating to be standing in freezing weather and the train stops at the platform, then inches up a few more feet, stops again, then inches up a few more feet, then you stand waiting some additional time while someone decides to open the doors.

VRE Management:

I am still working with the host railroads to get it done.

Michele from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

I know this was my fault, but I recently missed my evening stop at Leeland Road because (1) I had been snoozing; (2) the train was running early; and (3) the overhead sign said we were at Brooke. It wasn't until we were pulling away from the stop that the conductor said Fredericksburg was next. Would it be possible for the conductors to monitor the announcements to make sure they are accurate? This is especially appreciated in view of the darkness and inability to determine what station we are at when the Quiet Car is way past the platform and we cannot see the signs?

VRE Management:

Ensuring that the automated announcements are working properly is one of my top priorities. In addition to working with the crews to ensure they are working. I have also have staff riding the trains to help out. I expect to see considerable improvement in this area in the next few weeks.

Bonnie from Broad Run asks:

OK Smokers!! You've smoked that cigarette all the way to the station. So why can't you put it out in your car/truck ashtray instead of throwing it in the parking lot or in the garage? Have you

ever stopped to think of just how many cigarettes you throw on the ground over a year? Please be considerate and keep your butt(s) off the ground!

VRE Management:

I couldn't have said it better myself.

Sheryl from Manassas asks:

I've received five free passes from VRE. Three of those would not validate when I attempted to use them before purchasing the monthly pass. Why does this happen? How can I still ride the train without having to purchase a single ticket at the last moment? Thanks!

VRE Management:

Anytime you have a ticket that will not validate in our TVMs, you can approach the conductor before boarding the train to inform him of the problem. More often than not, he will let you on.

Marie from Manassas Park asks:

Winter is here and it's cold. Could you please ask riders to wait until the train arrives at the station before holding the vestibule doors open?

VRE Management:

I'll see that this gets worked into some of our courtesy announcements in the next few weeks.

Peter from Rolling Road asks:

What has been the track record of the new engine (V50) that you've been testing? Hasn't it broken down several times and been the cause of some long delays? If so, will the new engines that you'll be getting soon have the same problems?

VRE Management:

While the engine has been delayed, it performs better than the older locomotives. Even if the new locomotives have problems (and they will since no mechanical machine is 100% reliable) we can address them quicker since the new locomotives have on-board diagnostic systems that transmit information to a central database system that will be monitored constantly.

Dan from Manassas, VA asks:

VRE is the best commute in the nation and, with the new engines coming every two weeks and with the extension of the government subsidy of \$230/month, we riders should be very thankful.

VRE Management:

Thanks, Dan I appreciate your kind words.

Karen from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

When are you going to retire those horribly uncomfortable, dark, dingy old coaches?

VRE Management:

Even if I were able to pay for new cars now, it would take at least two to three years for them to arrive, but I will replace them. I need to find the money first.

Matt from Haymarket VA asks:

When, when, when will Piper Lane be widened and expanded into the Broad Run Station parking lot and when will the traffic light at Piper Lane help (rather than hinder) folks from gettin gout of the parking lot in the evening?

VRE Management:

We have approached VDOT many times about the timing of the light with no luck. I can certainly ask them again and ask them about widening Piper Lane.

Ronnie from Burke asks:

For goodwill purposes...why do you make riders severe lateness have a real 'reward' from the riders eperspective? One FRC for any length of time of late stinks. Why not 30 min+ the same as now gets a FRC -- but ONLY up to one hour late. One hour to an hour and a half gets 5 FRC and anything above that whihc is totally unacceptable (And way too often) gets a 10 ride ticket! This would make us all feel a little less hostile and show you care, and provide some incentive for VRE to get things in order!

VRE Management:

Thanks for the suggestion. I think what will garner the most good will is to provide a reliable service so FRCs do not have to be given out.

Steve from Burke, VA asks:

Are the new locomotives on order arriving and when will they be put into service? The service disruptions are far to frequent because of the tired locomotives VRE currently uses!

VRE Management:

We recently got the second locomotive before the new year. We run plenty of tests to ensure it is reliable and put them into revenue service a few weeks after we get them.

Sunny from Springfield, VA asks:

Announcements on trains are VERY unintelligible. Latest example: Monday's Train 332 was stopped 30 mins at Alexandria. The three announcements were all NOT clear at all, no one on my car could understand what was going on. System needs to be Fixed!

VRE Management:

Scott says I will look into it.

Frank from Dead Fred, VA asks:

Hey VRE Riders, there's a nice University of Colorado stocking cap in the Lost and Found. (along with a slightly soiled pair of brown leather gloves) Yours for the asking! I'm too lazy to schlep up to Alex to claim them. Ciao! frank

VRE Management:

We normally don't gift Lost and Found items. However, if items are left in our L&F for a considerable amount of time, we will donate them to charitable causes so they can be used.

Rick from Centreville, VA asks:

Are you aware of the bottom left step of the old center stairs to the platform at Burke Centre crumbling apart? Thanks.

VRE Management:

I will forward your observations on to our Facilities Superintendent.

VRE Management:

Thank you for another lively chat. Scott enjoyed chatting as well and looks forward to seeing improvement this month over November and December. He would like to join us again in the future.

Next month, the On-Line Forum is on February 2nd, and Brian Johnson, Keolis Afternoon Transportation Manager, is scheduled to join us.

See you then!

Dale