

## Let's Talk!

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



There are currently 55 questions waiting to be answered.

### **VRE Management:**

Happy Fall! Thanks to all of you who filled out the survey. It is very important to us and our operation. I understand it went very well from the feedback from VRE staff. Now on to the questions!

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**John** from **Alexandria, VA** asks:

Will the closure of the Alexandria coal plant reduce the amount of freight traffic on the rail lines the Northern Virginia area?

### **VRE Management:**

The rails to that coal plant is mostly served by Norfolk Southern (trains serving that plant run over a small section of CSX territory in Alexandria, but mostly on the third track which we hardly use) and we normally do not have a problem with freight congestion on NS territory. To answer the question, the closing will not have much impact on freight traffic, or VRE service.

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**Mark** from **Manassas Park** asks:

When is the VRE schedule going to be added to Google Transit, Bing, Etc? Amtrak, MARC and Metro are all on board. What is the open issue?

### **VRE Management:**

I know the internet is an important source of information and many users want to see our information integrated into search engines. We have to overcome some legal issues for that to happen.

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**Rick** from **Stafford, VA** asks:

First VRE great decision to bring Keolis on board to run the trains. They've been outstanding in their service and seem to be getting better all of the time. I've never seen so many on time (or before time) arrivals at L'Enfant. Second... speaking of which... I take the 308 out of Fredericksburg and the train is really moving... until Alexandria... then its a crawl and sometimes

a brief stop... seems to be every morning? Why? We could be arriving a lot earlier if we weren't shut down like that.

**VRE Management:**

Alexandria is where the Manassas and Fredericksburg Lines converge. It is the “Mixing Bowl” on the rail lines and sometimes trains need to slow down as many trains operate in that area. There is an Amtrak train that operates just ahead of train 308. Add it all together and some congestion is bound to happen.

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**Paul from Woodbridge, VA** asks:

Does one long freight train cause more damage to the railroad tracks than all the VRE trains in a day?

**VRE Management:**

I don't have figures, but I doubt that there is one freight train that operates in our territory that causes more wear and tear on the rails than all of our passenger trains. Comparing one freight train to one passenger train though, it is safe to say that the weight of a freight train is much heavier than any passenger train and will cause more wear.

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**michelle from fredericksburg-quantico** asks:

truth to the rumor of getting rid of the quantico stop?

**VRE Management:**

There is absolutely no truth to this rumor. Sadly though, there is a possibility that the vendor may go away one day in the future. If the ticket sales at this location continue to go down with the recent change in SmartBenefits. Time will tell.

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**Stan Ding from Fred, VA** asks:

Can anything be done to keep riders from sitting/standing in the stairwells of the railcars? Quite often riders choose to sit/stand there first, before utilizing an empty seat. Plus those that sit/stand in the stairwell often act rudely towards those trying to go up or down.

**VRE Management:**

I can ask the conductors to talk to the passengers to make sure they understand they are in the way of other passengers and may be better to take an actual seat.

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**Terry from Fred: VA.** asks:

Hi Dale, I know VRE is not running on Monday but I have to work. Can I use a step up ticket for Amtrak to get to work that day? Thanks...

**VRE Management:**

Yes.

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**Bill from Burke asks:**

Time to call the Zenith repairman again -- at last count there were four TV monitors inoperable at the Burke and L'Enfant station platforms. Perhaps it's time to take them down if they aren't useful to passengers and take valuable maintenance dollars.

**VRE Management:**

We have just started a program to go through our stations and fix the problems we have been having. Burke Centre is on the list. I will double check on L'Enfant.

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**Brian from Manassas asks:**

I saw a bunch of the old style "ghetto" cars in the Norfolk Southern Yard in Manassas yesterday. Are they going away!?!? Are new cars on their way in? That would be AWESOME if the old ones were leaving because they are not very comfortable. Having to ride in them every morning is not fun!

**VRE Management:**

The cars you saw are the ones VRE sold to the US Army. We have to keep the legacy cars to run full VRE service, at least until we get more new cars, which will take 2-3 years. Even then, we will keep some as backup, just in case.

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**Matt from Woodbridge, VA asks:**

Why do trains still have to go so slowly North of Lorton and just South of Franconia/Springfield? Why hasn't CSX lifted the speed restrictions? It's been almost a month since the track washed out and re-built. This slowness causes us to be delayed a few minutes every morning and then the slowness into Crystal City costs another few minutes and so we never go to L'Enfant before 7:30 anymore like we used to earlier this summer.

**VRE Management:**

While I know it has been almost a month since the storms on September 8th it is going to take some time for the tracks to settle in that area. Since the damage that had been done was significant.

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**Dan Peacock from Manassas, VA asks:**

VRE keeps us safe, even in floods! The picture in the last VRE Newsletter, shot from the 40 by 50 by 40 foot crater created by the torrential rains, showed nothing between the photographer and the sky but 2 sets of tracks and some ties. The engineer who stopped the Fredericksburg Train before reaching the washed out bridge in September must receive some type of award. No one should complain about flood restrictions. Thanks for keeping us safe!

**VRE Management:**

I am very grateful on Fredericksburg Train #309. They will be recognized at our next Board meeting. While we get a lot of complaints about speed/flood restrictions, they are for your safety and this is just one example.

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**Mike from Lorton, VA asks:**

I noticed Fredericksburg OTP has gone down the past two months thanks to CSX. Tell them to stop issuing speed restrictions all the time and put their trains in the way of VRE trains. We need to go at constant fast speed up and down the line to stay on schedule - no slowness is allowed. Trains can go quickly and safely not slowly and safely

**VRE Management:**

The weather over the past few months certainly has not helped us but when looking at the OTP for the Fredericksburg Line since September 13th, the Fredericksburg Line has been operating at 95%. My goal is to keep it there.

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**Michael from Manassas, VA asks:**

When will the Broad Run platform extension work be complete?

**VRE Management:**

By the end of the year.

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**Theodora from Fredericksburg asks:**

There's a couple who ride 302 in the mornings and sit in the quiet car. She gets on at Rippon and he gets on at Lorton. They have whispered conversations in the quiet car and were reported. They stopped, but since the original conductor is no longer there, they've continued this annoying practice. Can you please ask the conductors to re-enforce the quiet zone in the quiet car please?

**VRE Management:**

I'll look into this.

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**KK from Manassas** asks:

Why do the conductors change so often? By the time, the conductors get to knowing faces, and we get to know them, they are off and gone.

**VRE Management:**

The conductors are allowed to re-bid every 30 days. If someone with more seniority decides to change. It will often have a domino effect. There was a big shift this month probably due to wanting to change hours with the fall.

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**John from Fredericksburg** asks:

Theres a gentleman who gets on at Quantico and as soon as he enters the quiet car, the odor emanating from his person saturates the entire car. Is there anything we can do about that, short of washing him? Its quite noticeable and was even remarked upon the other day.

**VRE Management:**

"Aren't you glad you use Dial? Don't you wish everyone did?" But seriously, one of the drawbacks of public transportation is that we cannot enforce basic hygiene.

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**Weneed Morecars from Crowded, VA** asks:

Does VRE have an actual plan to increase the number of cars on each train consist? As I am sure you are well aware, numerous AM and PM trains are beyond capacity. I understand that \$\$\$ is needed to purchase more cars...and that purchasing cars takes time...but come on...you have known ridership has been gradually and then motherloading in capacity for quite some time.

**VRE Management:**

I have been aware of rising ridership. This past May, I was able to add some cars to certain trains by parking one train in Broad Run instead of DC. We are currently working on being able to use the tracks next to L'Enfant for storage once automated switches and signals are put in. Also looking for extra land to lease in DC, but again need to find funding for that.

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**Gus from Quantico** asks:

How many busses does it take to carry the passengers off one train? I am asking this based on seeing how long it took to get people home after the rainstorm that washed out the section of track south of Franconia. Has VRE made changes to their emergency plans since that debacle?

**VRE Management:**

An average six car train has about 873 seats. The average bus has 50 seats. That's roughly 18 buses, especially if there are standees on the train. When something of that magnitude happens

with very short notice, it is simply going to take a long time to get everyone home. But I will make sure that we get everyone home that does not have an alternate backup plan.

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**K from Broad Run asks:**

Is the Gainesville station going to be in a different zone than broad run when it opens.

**VRE Management:**

First we need to be sure where the stations are going to be located.

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**Tom from Gainesville, VA asks:**

Re station announcements, don't most train lines give fewer of them? That has worked well for 10 years. Not to mention that overseas you are on your own to know when to get off. Whereas on VRE we have abundant, clear outdoor signs, fancy scrolling neon red signs onboard, and a short, unchanging daily run - so we really don't need so much on the PA system, it degrades the ride to be barked at continually. Plus, they are a bit loud, and awkwardly phrased with the "Now at..." formula. The old tradition of saying just "next stop, Manassas!" and "Manassas," when in station," is best.

**VRE Management:**

Sorry, Tom, that you don't like the frequent announcements. When serving roughly 10,000 riders every day, it is a tough balancing act for these issues. Most veteran riders are able to tune out the routine announcements but the new rider is especially happy to hear them.

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**John from Broad Run asks:**

Hello Dale, VRE is a comfortable ride. Worth the fare. Any ETA on WiFi? Regards, John

**VRE Management:**

John, thanks for the compliments! WiFi will be awhile until I can find funding to do it properly. I hear Amtrak's WiFi service is having many problems, and I want to avoid that as much as possible.

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

Has Manassas Park City given any indication what their plans are concerning parking at the MP VRE lot? It's full before all of the riders for the 7:20 am (train 330) train arrive.

**VRE Management:**

No. I do not know of any plans.

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**Ken from Springfield, VA** asks:

Depending on the day, I ride either the Manassas Train 328 from Rolling Rd., or the Fredricksburg Train 308 from Lorton. What I've consistently seen is that the 328 runs five or so minutes behind and gets in late to Alexandria. Thus, it holds up the Fredricksburg Train 308 behind it. The 308 slows to a crawl and/or sits waiting for 328 to get well enough ahead of it. Is VRE aware of this, and what is being done to remedy it? If I use the 328 I am waiting for it past pick-up time (wasting my time); if the 308, it's timely to pick-up but crawling behind the 328 (again, wasting my time).

**VRE Management:**

Since we have all new locomotives and mostly new cars, we are aware that the schedules need to be tweaked a bit and we have Keolis and VRE employees working on that. While I have not noticed this conflict between these trains, I will be sure to look into it.

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**J from Alexandria VA** asks:

Please inform conductors not to poke you, shake you, or touch you just to let you know they want to check your ticket. This behavior is not only rude aggressive and intrusive, but can be construed as assault.

**VRE Management:**

I agree with you, however, if you do not have your ticket on display and you don't respond to their call for tickets. Sometimes they have few other options to get your attention.

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**k** from asks:

I thought standing in the vestibule was illegal and not safe. If there is room to stand in the aisle of the car I would think that the conductors should nicely tell people that they can't stand in the vestibule.

**VRE Management:**

Standing in the vestibule is not illegal but is definitely not the safest place for our passengers to ride. I will work with Keolis to ensure that this is enforced is a standard way across the board.

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**Sue from Woodbridge, VA** asks:

A few courtesy issues: people blocking the stairs when you are trying to come off the second level of the train and refusing to move, I am also seeing lots of women putting on their make up, a few times when the train comes to a stop make up has almost spilled on me, there just seems to be a lot of inconsiderate actions on the trains lately which is surprising, and lastly sneezing and coughing and not covering their face. Thanks

**VRE Management:**

More courtesy reminders from a fellow rider!

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**margareyt** from **manassas pk** asks:

Is it possible to add grab bars/handles to the seats at the center of the cars where there is only one set of seats (because the handicapped seats are opposite)? Where the handicapped seats are located on the side that doesn't have a handle it is fine, but where they replace standard seating that has a grab bar, there is nothing for short riders (standing) to easily grasp for stability. Tall standers can reach the luggage shelves. Would only need About 6 handles per car installed.

Thanks!

**VRE Management:**

Margareyt, I will look into it.

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**John** from **Manassas, VA** asks:

Dale, Any timeline yet on the alteration to the former ADA lift storage cage at Manassas Park so we can stand out of the rain?

**VRE Management:**

I'll look into it.

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**Robert** from **Manassas, VA** asks:

Now that the first round of "MOU projects" (I think there were 5?) to increase capacity has been completed - is there another round of projects pending to get us more trains? Operating more trains (especially those turnback trains) would seem to help the issue of finding additional midday storage?

**VRE Management:**

Another round of MOU projects is on my to do list.

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**Terrence** from **Washington DC** asks:

Are there any plansto expand the line towards Culpeper, Va.???

**VRE Management:**

No, not at this time. However, Amtrak 171 and 176 both stop at Culpeper, but you cannot use your VRE ticket to get there.

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**EL from Fredericksburg, VA asks:**

I am confused on how validation issues are supposed to be addressed prior to boarding. The vending machine said my ticket could not be read I reported it to the 303 conductor before boarding and she gave me a hard time. I'm not exactly sure what I'm trying to get away with telling the conductor prior to boarding. What exactly do you want us to do when we have validation issues? Can you apprise your staff of this procedure as well?

**VRE Management:**

Please send an email to [gotrains@vre.org](mailto:gotrains@vre.org) with the details of your encounter and I will look into it.

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**Jennifer from Springfield, VA asks:**

Are the bike racks at the Springfield VRE station going to be replaced as the station is rehabbed? The current racks are poorly designed - the ends can be unbolted and locked bikes can easily be slipped off.

**VRE Management:**

I will look into getting Fairfax to install a new bicycle rack.

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**Patricia from Woodbridge, VA asks:**

On August 9, 2011 I emailed a picture to VRE of the elevator inspection certificate which expired May 31, 2011. (This is the elevator in the parking garage.) I received a reply that the problem would be rectified. Nothing has been done as of today October 5, 2011. Also, last Thursday morning the elevator floor was one massive puddle of water. Is there a danger of electrocution?? If I didn't have to lug my wheeled computer case up and down 3 floors, I would NEVER use this elevator!!!

**VRE Management:**

I have asked our Facilities Superintendant to address the parking garage elevator at Woodbridge. I will make sure certificate is updated.

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**Dave from Woodbridge, Va asks:**

The 300 Express has gotten more and more popular. Is there anyway an extra car can be added to this early train? Most days it is standing room only!

**VRE Management:**

I would like to add another car but it would have to be done at the expense of another train and I can't justify doing that.

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**Mary from Richmond** asks:

I would like to know if the VRE is going to expand their coverage to Richmond area; if not please state the reason for not expanding the service to Richmond. Also, do the VRE receive state funding. Thank you

**VRE Management:**

Not at this time. The Richmond area is not part of the family of owning jurisdictions so we cannot provide service there. We would also need more funding and a major change in our operating agreements with CSX. While we do receive state funding, which pays for access fees and capital projects within our territory.

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**Michele from Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

Please up-date the status of the parking lot expansion for Leeland Road. It's really packed out and the dirt lot has suffered from the recent monsoons. I noticed this morning that Brooke was also at capacity.

**VRE Management:**

We are in the process of awarding the contract and expect construction completed in one year. I will also have the dirt lot addressed.

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**Peter from NOVA** asks:

SO, if there isn't going to be wifi in the foreseeable future, what, if anything, can you do about the abysmal cell phone service during the length of the Manassas Line?

**VRE Management:**

I am only aware of spotty cell service in the Clifton area of the Manassas Line and there is not much I can do about that. Clifton has very strict rules about development and doesn't want their town to be marred by cell phone towers.

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**Phil from Burke** asks:

Instead of relying on conductors to announce the "last chance to switch lines at Alexandria", how about including it in the automated announcements? The safety briefing is part of the automated system, so why not the last chance one? It would solve the issue of conductors not always announcing the line split.

**VRE Management:**

That is a good suggestion and will look into having that programmed. However, I find that

passengers pay more attention to real live voice announcements, and that one is an important one to hear.

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**Rich** from **Fredericksburg** asks:

I am a monthly ticket holder and I wonder why tickets aren't check every day?

**VRE Management:**

Because the condcutors have many duties in addition to ticket checking, checks are required to be random. Your ticket should be checked once every few days.

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**JB** from **Broadrun** asks:

Is there a going to a second way to get on the the platform at broadrun when it is done?

**VRE Management:**

Yes, there will be a new exit from the new section of platform at Broad Run.

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**George** from **Broad Run** asks:

Someone referenced a Gainesville station, as a new rider at Broad Run I was not aware of that. Where can I find more info on that?

**VRE Management:**

The reference is to our proposed new station in the Gainesville/Haymarket area. You can do a search on our website [www.vre.org](http://www.vre.org) for more info.

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**Beth** from **Broad Run, VA** asks:

In case nobody else says it - Thank You for the MUCH improved timeliness!! The new locomotives are really making a difference!!

**VRE Management:**

Awwwww, shucks. Thank you ma'am.

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**Monica** from **Haymarket, VA** asks:

Service has been really great of late, and I thank you for that. Question: is there anything that can be done to remind drivers at Broad Run that their parking and driving etiquette is an embarassment? Whether it's their refusal to park within the lines in a space, or their driving so fast during the evening mad dash that they almost run over pedestrians, they just make parking at

brod run totally unpleasant. We all want a good space in the a.m. and all want to get home to our families/loved ones in the p.m., so it would be nice if people would act like they are humans and not wild animals.

**VRE Management:**

Thanks, Monica, for the positive comment. As for driving courtesy at Broad Run (and all the other lots for that matter), I will make sure it is addressed in future announcements.

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**David from Tappahannock asks:**

Is there nothing that can be done to alleviate the parking situation in Fredericksburg? On three days of almost every week, the current parking lots are overflowing, and the commuters who ride the later trains (and thereby alleviate crowding on the earlier trains) must either park illegally and risk a ticket, or pay up to 20 percent of the daily fare for paid parking. This does not seem fair (nor prudent, since this discrimination is likely to drive them away from VRE). We shouldn't have to wait another three years until the Spotsy station opens.

**VRE Management:**

The City of Fredericksburg has continually stated over the past few years, they do not want to expand parking in the downtown area. There is a paid City garage on Sophia Street that passengers can use. Unfortunately, the opening of Spotsylvania is the only relief in sight.

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from **fredericksburg, va** asks:

I noticed in certain parts of the train there is a bad odor as if it is waste from the lavatory as well as other scents like cigarettes that linger and are a nuisance to those with allergies. Is there a way to improve these smells by purifying the air?

**VRE Management:**

We are working to reduce the lavatory "aroma." As for smelling smoke, please send an email to [gotrains@vre.org](mailto:gotrains@vre.org) as to which train it is on and I will address it.

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**Sarah from Manassas, VA asks:**

A subset of humans follow instructions/guidelines only when given an incentive to do so. They, despite announcements instructing otherwise, enter the vestibule before the train even enters the station; Queue early; Talk in the quiet car; Apply makeup, clip nails; Put shoes on walls/seats & belongings in the seat; etc. Why don't conductors INCENTIVIZE by asking individuals directly & very publicly to put their belongings or feet where they belong; use the restroom for personal hygiene; and to leave the vestibules or the doors will not open?? Guidelines are worthless if not enforced.

**VRE Management:**

I will work with the conductors to make sure they are enforcing courtesy issues.

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**Gary from Alexandria** asks:

Good morning Dale - Service is great. I'd like to join the chorus of riders who are concerned about the riders who choose to ignore the no smoking rules on the platforms. I'm sure it's almost impossible to enforce but riders are blatantly ignoring the signs and smoking on the platform at L'enfant after the trains have left the station in the morning. Anything you could do would be greatly appreciated. Thank you again for providing the best way to commute to work.

**VRE Management:**

Thanks, Gary! I will have courtesy announcements played about smoking only in designated areas on the platform.

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**Tye Erd from Dumfries, VA** asks:

How much longer will the Fred line trains have to deal with the speed restrictions near Lorton? I believe that the dealys are because of the track work done after the heavy rain washed the tracks away.

**VRE Management:**

Once the required tonnage has passed over the track work, inspectors go out and make sure it is safe to operate at track speed again.

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**Marty Manchild from The Woo** asks:

How is Dave, conductor on 302/303 doing? Tell him everyone misses him on the trains and it isn't the same without him.

**VRE Management:**

His shoulder is still recovering and he has been helping us out in the communication room but he is looking forward to when he can be cleared to be back on the trains again.

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**Tim from FBG** asks:

Any news to report on progress with the new Spotsylvania Station? Are there plans customers can take a look at...particularly access in/out of the station? Thanks.

**VRE Management:**

No new news, Spotsylvania is still doing their environmental impact studies and looking for funding. No plans that you can look at either, sorry.

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**Ed from Lorton, VA** asks:

Why hasn't construction started on the stairway and bridge at Franconia? I was told that VRE didn't want to go through another winter with it being so depleted.

**VRE Management:**

Construction has started on the walkway and the entire project is scheduled to be completed by December. You should see the stairway renovations soon.

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**Ed from Lorton, VA** asks:

Could something be done about the wind screens at Lorton Station? They are under the area that is covered and only make it difficult to get around people at the platform. Also could the riders that take the VRE to Lorton in the morning, could you park in the spots that aren't the closest ones?

**VRE Management:**

I will take a look at how the windscreens affect the foot traffic at Lorton. I cannot enforce where overnight cars are parked (except on Sundays in the summer when the Farmer's Market takes place, and then Fairfax County enforces that) and can only ask fellow riders to comply with your request.

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**Poo Patrol from Fred Line** asks:

Many of the coaches still smell like outhouses when they pull up.....

**VRE Management:**

Sometimes the toilets will smell from the outside of the car if the car has been sitting for some length of time. The smell is usually most noticeable at L'Enfant, Broad Run, and Fredericksburg. But after that the smell usually goes away unless there is a problem with the system. If you notice it somewhere else, please email [gotrains@vre.org](mailto:gotrains@vre.org) with more info.

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**Murty from Manassas** asks:

No questions; Thanks for providing us safe , comfortable and peaceful ride on VRE

**VRE Management:**

You know I always like ending on a happy note. Murty, you are welcome!

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**VRE Management:**

That's it for today. Have a wonderful month and knock on wood, we won't have too many leaf oil

issues on the Manassas Line. If there are, I will be happy to chat with you about them next month. Our next on-line forum will be November 2nd. "See" you then!  
-Dale

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