

## Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, September 7th at 12:00pm.



There are currently 50 questions waiting to be answered.

### **VRE Management:**

Welcome to the VRE On-Line Forum. Joining me today is Jeff Bennet, Transportation Manager of Keolis. We have lots of good questions today, so we'll just jump right in.

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### **Irene in Manassas from Manassas asks:**

Dale.. I wanted to thank you for having such a wonderful staff and policies. I lost my monthly ticket from my wallet during the Irene mess. Lezie Lamb provided me excellent customer service in helping me get a monthly ticket back to me. It was careless of me to lose it but I did. I wanted to thank you both for being there for me.

### **VRE Management:**

Irene, thank you for the compliment, I will pass it along to our staff. Our goal is to make customer service as painless as possible.

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### **Fumed from Fredericksburg asks:**

Can you move the line for smokers to be 10 feet from the north end? Each morning smokers congregate and chain smoke right where the 1st car stops. It's getting us direct exposure to second hand smoke and stinking up our clothes. Plus the smokers hack and cough. Please move them. After all they are drug addicts and VRE doesn't tolerate drugs.

### **VRE Management:**

Our current policy is for smokers to use the northern-most 100 feet of the platform and VRE doesn't tolerate illicit drugs. As long as you are of age, you have a right to use tobacco. I understand that not all people enjoy tobacco but this is the compromise between the two sides.

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### **John from Fredericksburg asks:**

I have a question regarding the AMTRAK Cross Honor Agreement. Your site says I can use the step up ticket with either the monthly, 5 day, or 10 trip. Why can't they be used with a single trip since this is the most expensive ticket you have.

**VRE Management:**

Passengers with multi-ride tickets have shown a long-term commitment to the VRE/Amtrak system and our agreement with Amtrak is based on this. To purchase a VRE Single Ride in addition to an Amtrak Step-Up is cheaper than buying directly through Amtrak and would take away potential Amtrak patrons.

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**Mr. Thomas from NOVA** asks:

Can you give us an actual month/year estimate of when you will be getting wifi? I understand that it cost more than you thought it would, etc., etc., but I would relaly appreciate having more than an "it's hopefully coming."

**VRE Management:**

I wish I could give an accurate estimate as to when WiFi would be operational on our trains. I am still looking for the funding to pay for it all, unfortunately. As a result, I do not have an esitmated date.

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**Monica from Haymarket, VA** asks:

Is there ANY way at all to get a train that leaves Broad Run after 7:50? For people who have kids and would like to drop them off to school, but who don't want to wait for a 10:19 Amtrak from Manassas, this sure would help. It's crazy that you can't work out something with whomever you need to talk to get a train at 8:30 or something. Your train schedule is just not conducive to people who want to actually be there for their children.

**VRE Management:**

We own our own equipment but we don't own the tracks. The railroads that do (CSX and Norfolk Southern) have to approve additional service. The CSX tracks especially are heavily travelled and would require significant infrastructure upgrades before they would allow us to add any more trains. If they did it now with no upgrades, we would degrade not only our trains but their trains as well.

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**Peter from Manassas Line** asks:

When (i.e. what year) is the train coming to Gainesville or Haymarket?

**VRE Management:**

Currently environmental impact studies are being conducted. I estimate in 3-5 years a station will be open in the Gainesville/Haymarket area.

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**David Kay from Lorton, VA** asks:

When will you find a service provider to fill gaps in coverage so you can provide WiFi on your trains?

**VRE Management:**

Many service providers have said they can do it, so that is not the issue. The main issue is funding for the necessary equipment to put on the VRE trains.

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**We still can't hear you from L'Enfant asks:**

Every day at 4:00 pm. the train is staged at L'Enfant station for at least 18 minutes. There has got to be somewhere else to stage this train, as an advocate for your customers can you talk to CSX on our behalf, SO WE CAN HEAR YOU AGAIN!!!

**VRE Management:**

We are talking with CSX to see if there is a better place to put it. However, the philosophy at this time is to let it sit by L'Enfant so it can go into Union as soon as there is a platform to put it on. If it were to wait further south, the possibility always exists that delays could happen as it makes it way north. The closer it waits to Union Station, the less chance of it being delayed.

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**David from Richmond VA asks:**

More of a statement than a question: If people would cross on the \*right\* side of Charles St street when heading to their cars in the PM, the right turn only turn from Frederick to Charles will be much more efficient. If you cross on the right, the Charles St traffic will be stopped, and people can leave the parking lot line a little faster - thus shortening the time your car will have to stay in line.

**VRE Management:**

Thank you for your suggestion. I will look into including this in our next Train Talk.

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**Callie from Stafford - Brooke asks:**

Was wondering if VRE will eventually phase out the last remaining older cars still in use. Not complaining, but they just are not as comfortable - Callie needs her solid hour of nap time before work!

**VRE Management:**

We are currently in the process of buying new railcars but they will probably not be on the property for the next two years. We will keep the legacy equipment until then.

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**Cindy from Bristow, VA asks:**

Good morning. The aggressive driving at Broad Run continues. I was tailed aggressively last evening (Train 329) by a driver who apparently could not grasp the concept that when a car is stopped in front of mine on Piper Lane I too have to stop - gasp! (And no, I do not sit 30 feet behind the car in front of mine). Is there any chance PWC police can increase visibility at Broad Run? If not, I see no option other than to call the non-emerg. # the next time this occurs which is a sad waste of law enforcement resources. I like riding VRE so I'm hoping this can be cleared up.  
Thx

**VRE Management:**

I'll ask Prince William to assign officers on a more regular basis.

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**Mark from Leeland Rd, asks:**

On the 306 train car V857 the conductor seems to be disabling the vestibule doors electronically leaving the doors open for most of the trip into Union Station. This does two things, passenger safety is at risk if there would be an incident. Then it causes the HVAC unit to run trying to condition the unconditioned space, also trying to condition the entire Fredericksburg line north. Can we just let the doors work the way they were designed?

**VRE Management:**

I'll ask the conductors to close the interior doors whenever they see them open. Some passengers could open them right back up. It could be a mechanical problem and I will have that looked at as well.

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**Smoke-Free from Manassas, VA asks:**

Good morning - at the Manassas Depot, the bench usually situated at the north end of the platform (in the designated smoking area) has been moved to an area facing the parking lot which in turn is encouraging smoking on that side of the depot. Can you please see if the bench can be relocated to the north end of the depot where it belongs? Thank you.

**VRE Management:**

I'll look into it.

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**Marc from Leeland Station asks:**

As we get closer to the opening of the new station on the Fredericksburg line in Spotsylvania, will the time schedule at the preceding stations change? Will the train just start earlier to keep the later station times the same or will the times be pushed back?

**VRE Management:**

Our current agreement with CSX doesn't allow us to operate earlier but is being considered as a possibility.

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**Davin from Woodbridge, VA** asks:

Two Weeks ago I emailed you my FRC request for the late trains due to the earthquake. I've not heard anything from VRE since and in the past I received it within a week or so. Did you receive my email?

**VRE Management:**

I will look into it. Please send it in again just in case. If it is already being processed, we will just send you one.

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**Mark from Lorton, VA** asks:

Can you do something like changing the Man train schedule so that it doesn't keep causing Train #306 to creep from Alex to Crystal City? We have to do this a few days each week

**VRE Management:**

I have tasked people to look at the Manassas Line schedule and recommend changes to me.

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**monica from haymarket** asks:

To follow up on my question last month, have you looked into possibility of parking for expectant mothers?

**VRE Management:**

As you may know, parking at many of our stations is at or near capacity. Unfortunately, parking for expectant mothers is not something that can be considered, particularly as it would be extremely difficult to monitor valid use.

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**James from Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

Which line has more daily riders? Blue or Red? Thanks! Keep up the good work.

**VRE Management:**

Fredericksburg has the most daily riders.

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**Mark from Woodbridge, VA** asks:

Why does the conductor hang around the platform for a short while instead of having the train leave right away after everybody's boarded/detrained in the afternoon? Sometimes we seem to spend too long dwelling at the station, when we could have left 30 seconds earlier

**VRE Management:**

Jeff says we don't want to leave any passengers behind by leaving too early.

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**Nancy from Burke Centre** asks:

I notice that there have been some new policy changes recently, for example, if a monthly pass is forgotten, in the past we could tell the conductor before getting on the train but now we must get a ticket, pay the fine, and then 'prove' we had the ticket, and then get reimbursed. I'm wondering if long-time passengers might have trouble with this particular new policy and if some problems might be avoided by making a bigger point of the new policy? "In light of our improved on-time record, VRE is able to tighten up on some policies where we were formerly more lenient, like ticketing...."

**VRE Management:**

The policy has not changed. If you are the owner of a monthly ticket that was left behind, you just need to send it in Amanda (avitko@vre.org) within 3 days of receiving the summons. And she will contact you about waiving the summons.

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**Big Dave from Woodbrige, VA** asks:

Each morning on the 300 train the same people in the last car stand in the way in the vestibule from the Alexandria stop till the L'Enfant stop. They make it very difficult for others to get off at the Crystal City stop. I thought it was unsafe to stand in the vestibule while the train was moving?

**VRE Management:**

I will look into it.

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**John from Manassas, VA** asks:

When will the old wheelchair lift cage at Manassas Park station get opened up so we can stand out of the rain?

**VRE Management:**

Can't tell you when but we are in the process of modifying the cages to stand in them during inclement weather.

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**Jeff from Washington, DC** asks:

Why doesn't VRE make good use of the property behind the LeEnfant stop? Instead of the hedges, why can't sitting areas with umbrellas (like the ones at Six Flags, durable) be installed.

Would make waiting for delayed trains or your next train more comfortable and could address crowding/safety issues.

**VRE Management:**

Interesting idea. I'll think about it.

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**Courtney Renee from Manassas Park, VA** asks:

Are there any plan to increase parking capacity at the Manassas Park Station? Currently, there are no spaces available for the last train.

**VRE Management:**

There are no plans at this time. I know it is over capacity.

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**Dan from Manassas, VA** asks:

VRE is doing a stellar job on on-time performance. Thank You! With reduction in Step-Up charges (\$10 to \$5) in May, are more VRE'ers with multi-ride tickets riding specific Amtrak trains?

**VRE Management:**

Yes, over 200 people a day use Amtrak Step-Up tickets since the reduction.

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**Davis from Riva, MD** asks:

Hey VRE, you guys do an amazing job and always have the best looking trains out on the line! Some of your crews have probably seen me, as I am out frequently at Alexandria filming your trains and watching them roll by! Anyways, I was wondering if with future service expansion what your plans were for L'Enfant? I have heard that one plan was to extend your siding there to have switches on both ends. How is work going on this? Also, is VRE at all looking into possibly acquiring space at CSX's "Jersey Yard" which lies dormant to any use just North of L'Enfant? Thank you for your time, Davis

**VRE Management:**

We have plans to add a signalized switch to the north end which would make it easier to park trains there and still service Union Station. As far as unused or underutilized railyards in DC, we are looking at those as definite possibilities for more storage.

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**Jim from Manassas** asks:

My compliments for running a solid operation this summer...good job. My only complain is the Phantom Flood Warnings ... it's getting a bit silly. Here's a pop quiz for VRE and Norfolk

Southern: When was the last time there was flooding on the Manassas line that bad enough to actually prevent trains from running safely? I'd be really curious to know.

**VRE Management:**

About two years ago an NS freight car fell into a creek near Van Dorn that had washed out the track underneath the car. The danger is real with heavy flooding on the railroad track.

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**Tim from FBG asks:**

Has VRE considered the recent federal expansion of the 4 day, 10 hour work schedule being offered and its impact on the earliest trains?

**VRE Management:**

Good question. The problem is, most people take Mondays or Fridays off making Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday our busiest days. We have to size our fleet for those days. If teleworking and flex scheduling was distributed evenly through the week, we could handle more riders.

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**Tom from Spotsy asks:**

Can anything be done about the air circulation in the elevator? The problem is that there is none. It gets VERY stuffy in there!

**VRE Management:**

Please email [gotrains@vre.org](mailto:gotrains@vre.org) to let us know which elevator you are referring to and I will have a Facilities Superintendant look into it.

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**Leah from Stafford, VA asks:**

Any update on getting Stafford County S.O. to address the speeding situation to and from Brooke? Some people have absolutely no care or concern for follow riders as they cut across the parking lot & cut people off in order to get the closest parking spot. Also, the tailgating that goes on while driving in and out of the station everyday is getting out of control. We're all trying to get home and/or to work and we'd all like to arrive there safely, your time isn't any more important than the rest of ours. I'm tired of getting knocked around by grown men while detraining..show some respect!

**VRE Management:**

I hear you, Leah. We are all in this commute together so please show courtesy and respect at all times. We will all be safer for it.

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**Casey Jones** from **Kingstowne** asks:

Can you provide on time performance at each station for each line?

**VRE Management:**

No, not by station, but but line each day. And that is available on our website, on our Daily Download.

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**Bob** from **Brooke** asks:

What is the work that was done to the platform at Brooke?

**VRE Management:**

The major is work is concrete repairs to the platform and opening up the liftgate for riders to use during inclement weather.

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**Robin** from **VA** asks:

When will VRE offer high speed rail service to and from Richmond VA, Fredericksburg, VA and Washington DC?

**VRE Management:**

Not in the near future.

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**Davin** from **Woodbridge, VA** asks:

I know their is a flash floor warning now in effect until 2:30. Please no slow trains this evening, I need to get home on time for a meeting tonight

**VRE Management:**

Sorry, flash flood restrictions are in effect for both lines this evening.

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**Tom** from **Spotsy** asks:

Is there any plans to extend the Fredericksburg station platform to Charles Street, and have a stairs down to the street level there? That would be a great help to riders.

**VRE Management:**

No plans at this time.

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**Rich** from **Washington DC** asks:

Hey VRE! Just wondering if you guys were looking into running any off-peak trips? It seems like your last North in the morning could run back South as an off-peak to Fred and then turn back as a late North departure to Washington for people who need to come in late. And then your first South in the afternoon could run to Fredericksburg then turn around and run back North as an off-peak so that it could be ready and waiting to go South again with another load of people who want to leave later in the evening. You could then add 4 trips with your existing equipment! Food for thought Rich

**VRE Management:**

Right now, the rails between Fredericksburg and DC are saturated with trains (VRE, Amtrak, freight) without anymore room to expand service without negatively impacting the performance of the railroad. Also, CSX holds many freight trains outside of VRE service territory until our service is finished. More tracks and switches need to be built before we can start adding more trains.

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

Are there plans to ever finish the walkway to the Manassas Park station? Especially the past few days with this rain having to walk through the puddles and mud at the stairs and near the track crossing.

**VRE Management:**

I'll talk to the City about completing the job.

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**Clif** from **Warrenton, VA** asks:

Would it be possible (on the Manassas line) for the conductors to turn down their radios a little when they're walking through the cars--especially the quiet car? They are usually at ear-piercing volume. While it's interesting to know that we "just cleared Alexandria," I can see that for myself by looking out the window. Thank you.

**VRE Management:**

Jeff says I will remind the conductors about the radio volume.

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**Kenny** from **Fredericksburg** asks:

Messages are sent out when the elevators at Rippon, Woodbridge and Springfield are out. Why are no messages sent out when the elevator at the Fredericksburg station is out?

**VRE Management:**

If we know that the elevators are out at Fredericksburg, we will report it.

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**Bill from Burke** asks:

I wanted to make another pitch for VRE to make better use of the old TVs above the platform. Of those that are actually working, they only have static or delayed information. But many are out of order. Dale, I'm sure you've seen the one at Burke, which has been black for weeks. Are you waiting for the Zenith repairman to come or do you find them of little use as the rest of us?

**VRE Management:**

Our IT staff, which consists of the manager and the network administrator, regularly visit the stations to make sure they are working. I will have them look at Burke. As for changing the presentation of the variable message signs, that would require funding. Right now our focus is to purchase more equipment and get WiFi on the trains.

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**Gimpy from Broad Run** asks:

You recognized the need for more parking at Broad Run, but didn't add more handicapped parking. I have checked the regulations and you are compliant, but logically, when there are more riders, there are more disabled ones, too. Now that vacations are over, the handicapped ones fill up by 6:10 AM. This is more than just "convenience" (trust me-I WISH I could walk the distance). It is safety, too. You don't want mobility-impaired people coming down the drive from the upper lot because they cannot use the stairs, or tripping somewhere on the long walk to the platform.

**VRE Management:**

All our parking lots meet the ADA requirement, unfortunately, we cannot add any more spaces at this time.

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**Jeff from Woodbridge, VA** asks:

Between the morning and afternoon trains (excluding the mid-day trains), what do the conductors and engineers do? Do they change and go to another job during the day?

**VRE Management:**

They are officially off duty and can do as they please. Federal Railroad Administration regulations requires a certain amount of rest between trains. If we ever had an extended service disruption in the morning, say six hours, there may be some delayed trains in the afternoon if we don't have enough extra crew members rested.

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**Gary from Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

With the lot at Fredericksburg often full and the rear section unlit and unpaved, is there any chance a parking deck could be built there?

**VRE Management:**

Fredericksburg has stated many times over the years that they do not want to expand parking in the downtown area anymore. Relief will come when Spotsylvania builds a station and parking lot.

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**Terry from Fred; VA asks:**

How come we can not use a step up ticket for Saturday trains. There times where I have to work on Saturdays but can't use a step up.

**VRE Management:**

That is not in the VRE/Amtrak agreement. And with Amtrak filling up their own trains lately, they have no real incentive to reduce revenue by selling us discounted seats.

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

I would like to know why the announcements at the Manassas Park station are so loud that I can hear them way across the street at my apartment complex! The message only needs to be heard on the platform. Also, the frequency of the same announcement needs to be reduced. Hearing the same message starting at 5:00 a.m. every three minutes a block away is beyond annoying.

Thanks.

**VRE Management:**

I will have our IT manager check the dB level and make sure it is within the parameters.

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**Stephan from Manassas asks:**

How can I get a 20K pin?

**VRE Management:**

We have 20k magnets, but no pins. Send an email to [gotrains@vre.org](mailto:gotrains@vre.org) and we will send you one.

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**Shane from Fredericksburg asks:**

Why do you guys continue to give tickets to people who are using free ride passes that are not validated. When all you have to do is tear them up. It seems as though you guys want us to do what we are supposed to do and be responsible, but you want to ignore your responsibility by checking tickets everyday, because if you did nobody would be cheating, you could just tear them up EVERYDAY! And if you must write a ticket tell your guys write them and leave the comments!

**VRE Management:**

FRCs must be validated like all other forms of VRE fare media. We cannot check every ticket every day. Random inspections keep most riders honest. A rider could game the system and see how many times he can ride on an FRC without validating it; a move which we are trying to reduce.

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**Matt from Fredericksburg asks:**

We all know budgets are tight and will be for many years to come. I think it's time for you all to make some tough decisions and move up 313 to depart Union Station @ 3:00. That last train is almost empty to begin with. This will give us an Express home in the afternoon and cost nothing. We need this now! I would be willing to pay a premium to get this service!

**VRE Management:**

The window in which we can currently operate in doesn't allow us to operate any earlier than we can now. We would have to fund significant track upgrades before it can be considered. Our organization or any of our member jurisdictions or Virginia cannot fund a venture of that sort right now.

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**Jason from F'burg asks:**

Thank you for all of the services you provide. I remember asking for more bike racks in Fredericksburg, and we certainly have them! I noticed this morning that I haven't heard the "No Queuing" announcement in a while. Have things improved with that? Last week about a dozen people (including myself) stood behind a guy in at Alexandria that never moved once the train stopped. He was waiting for Union Station!! He almost got drop kicked for blocking everyone. This hasn't been a problem for a while that I have noticed, so hopefully things have improved on all the other trains.

**VRE Management:**

We'll keep working the issue.

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**Mothers in need from Manassas asks:**

If an expecting mother is in real need the DMV will issue a red (temporary) Handicap permit. All you have to do is download the form from the DMV website, have your doctor sign off on it and take the form to the DMV. This permit is good for six months.

**VRE Management:**

Good to know for expectant mothers.

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**Nicole from Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

Can the conductors on 308 announce whether the quiet car will make the platform at Union Station? There are usually several people still in the car who need to walk back once we realize the doors will not be opening. In the last couple weeks, I can only think of once or twice when it has been announced.

**VRE Management:**

Jeff says I will ask them to do so.

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**Tom from Gainesville, VA** asks:

Great service, VRE! Re the station announcements, and emergency awareness notices, they are too many and too loud, and station warnings are quite unnecessary until destination stops are reached - e.g. Alexandria onwards on northbound runs. And there are too many reminders for careless riders on the wrong train. Caveat voyager! And please, please re-do the "L'Enfant Plaza" bits, the reader for some reason mangles it. It's "lon-font," just ask the Keolis folks!

**VRE Management:**

Let me see if I can answer this: Every week we have an incident of someone getting on the wrong train. It happens more than you think. I know about the announcement for L'Enfant Plaza. I will have it changed the next time the recordings are changed. I know riders are getting off at intermittent stations, especially on the Fredericksburg Line. If train cars announcements are too loud, please send an email to [gotrains@vre.org](mailto:gotrains@vre.org) with a car number and I will have the dB level checked.

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**Rachel from Gainesville, VA** asks:

Hello, I LOVE VRE and can't wait for you to expand!! What is the status of the Gainesville extension of the VRE? I keep hearing 3 to 5 years? What does that mean -- project finished in 3 to 5 or started in 3 to 5 years?

**VRE Management:**

Thanks for the compliment. The Gainesville extension should be completed in 3-5 years IF we gain the construction funding.

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**Rain from The Sky** asks:

We all know about flash flood warnings and the huge impact it has on the commute home. Some questions: 1. Why do the speeds differ between the two lines? 2. When it's sunny and no rain, why do we still have speed restrictions? Some of the warnings are a little premature. 3. Who imposes the speed restrictions and where is this person? 4. Is there a way to have

communications between the conductor/engineer and this person that decides the speed restrictions to determine if speed restrictions are needed? Thank you.

**VRE Management:**

The difference between the two lines is that the two lines operate on different rails, Fredericksburg on CSX and Manassas primarily on Norfolk Southern and some of the route on CSX. The companies have different parameters for flood restrictions. However, they both depend on NWS/NOAA issued warnings. If there is an official warning, even though it hasn't rained yet, the railroads abide. Train crews don't make decision on whether restrictions are needed or not, that is the railroad management responsibility.

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**Steve from Burke, VA asks:**

Hi Dale, With Summer over trains will be more stuffed than ever. I appreciate the great on-time performance for most of the summer...Good job to everyone at VRE. With all of us bunched together, I can only hope riders show some love for each other! Remember, this is not your living room or office, keep cell call short 1-2 minutes max and talk softly. No one wants to listen/bothered by your personal calls. Keep your packages/bags/feet off seats that someone should be using. In parking areas follow the rules, stop at stop signs and don't drive the wrong way in one way areas.

**VRE Management:**

Courtesy reminders from Steve!

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**Betty from Cosmos asks:**

Dale I was hoping to find the meaning of life on my VRE train and I'm still searching. I'll keep you posted.

**VRE Management:**

When you find the meaning let me know, because I don't know either :)

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**Monthly/Daily Rider from Stafford asks:**

Morning Dale, My question is two-fold. First a compliment to Gerald, the conductor on the morning F'burg #310, always smiling, curious and helpful. He is just about the only conductor who manages to check all tickets every morning. Question #1-Once we are all on the "Smart-Trip" vs "vouchers" how will this process (checking of tickets) be done? A visual check won't cut it. Question #2-Also, why aren't tickets ever checked in the evenings? In about 14 mos I've seen them checked about 3 times. Seems like it leaves the door open for a lot of free rides for non-monthly ticket holders.

**VRE Management:**

the change from couchers to SmartBenefits will not affect the process of checking VRE tickets which will stay the same. Please send in an email to [gotrains@vre.org](mailto:gotrains@vre.org) with the train number you ride in the morning and we will look into why tickets aren't being checked on your evening train.

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**VRE Management:**

Thanks for a lot fo the positive comments today, especially for on-time, the crews, and VRE staff. There are a lot of question on WiFi and when we will get it. The situation right now is we do not have funding for WiFi and I have higher priorities. The most critical one is to purchase some more new railcars so we can eliminate all the legacy Gallery cars in service. Until that is done, I don't think we will be able to do anything with the WiFi.

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**VRE Management:**

However, there is good news. The cell phone connectivity on both lines has been much improved over the last year. I notice more people using PDA's and tablets on the train. I have made the decision to not charge the riders for WiFi and it should be free to the rider, which makes the funding for the necessary equipment more difficult. I will keep you updated as to when we can install WiFi.

Our next On-Line Forum will be October 5th. See you then!

-Dale

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