

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, February 1st at 12:00pm.



There are currently 70 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Welcome to another session of our Monthly On-Line Forum. I want to thank you for joining me on such a beautiful day. We just posted a record systemwide On Time Performance of 98.3% in January. Now on to the questions!

G from Rippon asks:

Based upon the Board Meeting Agenda for January 2012, am I to correctly assume that the earliest we will see any additional rail cars is January 2014?

VRE Management:

You are correct, G.

G from Rippon asks:

What is being done to handle the overcrowding on various trains such as 303 and 305 on Fred line? Consist page shows 303 has capacity of 798 but averages 1061 riders and 305 has capacity of 819 with 972 riders.

VRE Management:

I know many trains are overcrowded. 307 has the eight car set but also averages over 1,000 riders. I am looking into some possibilities.

G from Rippon asks:

Please send someone out to check the stairs at the Rippon station...some look in need of Repair and I hate to see an issue where the elevator is the only option.

VRE Management:

I will have our Facilities Superintendent look into it.

Freddie from Brooke asks:

I am noticing more and more afternoon riders getting on at Springfield and Lorton...have you seen this also? Is it in any way related to BRAC or any other realignment?

VRE Management:

As ridership grows, so does boarding at all stations, including Lorton and Springfield. We should know more when we do the customer survey in May.

Althea from Woodbridge asks:

I know some people get discounted tickets for being disabled. But when you pull into the garage at Woodbridge, it's nothing but luxury vehicles parked in the handicapped spots. Cadillacs, BMW's, Corvettes, Range Rovers. How does it make sense that people so well off pay half as much as the rest of us? Sounds like another perk for the 1%!

VRE Management:

An individual's financial situation has no bearing on whether or not they are disabled and qualify for disabled parking.

Scott from Manassas, VA asks:

Must the VRE's twitter profile publish the daily downloads every day? I can't say how annoying it is to get sent these messages every single day. I use the twitter feed to know when my train is late, not to get daily links sent to me.

VRE Management:

I understand your concerns about Twitter feed and the amount of messaging we all receive but I think the Daily Downloads are a vital link for keeping riders informed. What I have tried to do is send the Daily Download outside the standard operating time so as to confuse riders.

Brett from Fredericksburg VA asks:

Parking lot 'E' in Fredericksburg VA is not clearly marked between allowable spaces and not allowed spaces. Who is responsible for ensuring that parking spaces in parking lot 'E' are clearly identified?

VRE Management:

It is a leased lot but we will have our Facilities Superintendent look at it and see if we can address it with the landowner.

roberta simpson from Spotsylvania, VA asks:

Parking is really bad now at the back lot. By 700am people are parking all over the place. I am feared that my car some day will be blocked in. I haven't seen towing or ticketing. also what are the chances of it being paved? thank you

VRE Management:

We are aware that parking is tight back there and we continue to monitor the situation with the city but at this time neither VRE nor the City of Fredericksburg has the money to make that improvement.

Peter from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Why is their only one person working in the coffee/vendor shop at Woodbridge? Their should be two like before because when she is busy serving customers coffee, she can't help us purchase tickets. We don't have time to wait because a train is coming soon. As a result, I didn't have time to purchase my monthly ticket this morning.

VRE Management:

Unfortunately, this is a vendor-related concern and they may not have enough business to support paying two people. The only thing that I can suggest is purchasing or arriving a little earlier.

Cathi from Manassas VA asks:

Dale, after moving here four years ago and being a VRE commuter for that time, I am headed back to the Midwest. I want to compliment everyone at VRE for such a well-run, efficient operation. I LOVE TRAINS and will miss the daily ride!

VRE Management:

Thank you. The compliments are most welcome and best wishes on your move.

MariaSi from Gainesville, VA asks:

Thank you for the great and reliable service. . .What is the reason the plataform extension of Broad Run had taken so long. . . it has been in process of remodelation for more than 4 months. . . is that correct?

VRE Management:

Platform should be finished by the end of the month.

Mike from Fredericksburg asks:

It seems that everyday the 301 train is standing room only when we it arrives at Lorton. What are the chances of adding another car to this train?

VRE Management:

I believe you mean Train 303, not 301. Unfortunately at this time, we do not have the cars or the space to add additional capacity. We are doing what we can to shift the trains around prior to holidays and Fridays when possible.

Pat from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

I would like to know if the VRE will offer any wi-fi service in the future. As a commuter with a busy schedule it would be beneficial to make productive use of the hour+. Regards

VRE Management:

As I mentioned last back in January, WiFi is currently unfunded and we are looking for a source. My main priority right now is getting additional railcars.

Ed from Lorton, VA asks:

Why haven't the snowguards been replaced at Crystal City station yet? I know its been a warm winter, but those should have been replaced when you said you were going to look into it the first time. I also have been driving more to work as I tired of not finding a seat on the trains.

VRE Management:

I will check into the snow guards and get them replaced.

Mark from Warrenton, VA asks:

Why are we going to a Debit Card system? The current system works fine.

VRE Management:

The debit card system you are referring to is a federal government program, not a VRE program.

David Kay from Lorton, VA asks:

Is there anything VRE can do to make the allocation of Smart Benefits simpler?

VRE Management:

The SmartBenefits program is a WMATA program and because of that, we are trying to fit ourselves in and make it user friendly as we can. The best approach we have is to use CommuterDirect.com.

Steve from Burke, VA asks:

Dale, Super great to have the on-time percentage between 90-100% Great job to everyone at VRE. Have you seen any drop off in ridership with the lowering of the transit benefit? Also, will you wait to receive more rail cars before opening new stations due to high ridership? It nice to be able to get a seat at least in the am!

VRE Management:

As far as ridership, we will probably not see a drop off until Late February or early March. The commissions should approve a contract this month and by the end of the month we will order new railcars.

Randy from Bristow, VA asks:

Would you consider printing short biographies of engineers and conductors in your Wednesday updates? Might be nice to learn something about the operating crews, like railroad experience, etc.

VRE Management:

We agree with you and think it is a great idea and looking at rolling out something in the near future.

Frustrated Parker from Leeland Station asks:

Gdafternoon Dale,any idea when the additional parking at Leeland Station will be started/finished? With all the additional ridership and the closing of all the lots in F'burg, parking has become even more difficult to find at the Leeland Station lot, especially for the later trains and forget about the handicaps spots for later trains, they are non-existent. Thanks!

VRE Management:

Construction is planned to start in March at Leeland and scheduled to complete by the December which will add 200 spaces.

Kevin from Manassas, VA asks:

I previously asked why there were not pre-recorded audio messages at the stations advising people to validate their tickets, which you agree was a good idea on a previous talkback. Will VRE implement this at some point?

VRE Management:

Thank you for the reminder. We will look into making this happen.

Peter from Manassas, VA asks:

Can we please (please. please?) get the chat fixed so that when we read it, the page doesn't continually refresh back to the top of the page? It's always a pain to try to find my place again while reading. Thanks!
Peter

VRE Management:

I will ask that to be reprogrammed but in the meantime, if you manually refresh the page before the auto refresh, it will stay where you were reading.

Stanley from Leeland asks:

I am noticing more and more riders that instad of taking a seat, would prefer to stand in the vestibule or sit/stand in the stairwell...i think they view this as an easier way to vacate the train at Woodbridge and rippon.

VRE Management:

We do not want riders to ride in the vestibule unless absolutely necessary. They can sit in the stairwells as long as they do not block riders from passing.

Chunky from Manassas VA asks:

Hi Dale I was wondering if you could help me out. I've put on a few extra pounds over the holidays, and could use a little extra exercise. Could you guys just slow down the train and open the doors at the stations and I could run along (getting some much needed cardio) and jump on. This could have 3 potential benefits. One you'd have healthier passengers, Two it "would" reduce over crowding since those slower folks just won't make it, and Three it would add some much needed excitement to my otherwise pretty vanilla life. Just for those people who aren't sure, yes this is a joke.

VRE Management:

I wanted all of you to hear from Chunky on his new idea. But seriously, I am not considering it.

GM from Bristow, VA asks:

Why do VRE conductors need to be so rude?

VRE Management:

Send an email with details (train number, name, etc.) to gotrains@vre.org and I will look into it.

T-bone from Quantico asks:

I am noticing more and more people crowding toward the doors as we approach Woodbridge and Rippon...this appears to happen only in the cars by the station exits...can anything be done to get passengers to equally disribute from all cars?

VRE Management:

I am afraid this is something we cannot control.

Contented Commuter from Stafford asks:

Just a quick "attaboy/attagirl" for the way the trains have been running lately. They've been on-time and the conductors have been friendly, if not downright entertaining. Keep up the good work.

VRE Management:

Thank you for the compliments. I will make sure the conductors know as well.

Robert from Haymarket asks:

I was wondering if there was any more movement on the Manassas line VRE extension to Haymarket. Thank You.

VRE Management:

We are working to get funding agreements in place so we can initiate environmental review and preliminary engineering.

Larry from Fredericksburg asks:

I appreciate receiving the daily information on whether the trains ran ontime. Do you build in a "fudge factor"? Sometimes it seems like the train is a few minutes late but the report says "on time."

VRE Management:

A train is considered late if it is more than 5 minutes late into the end destination station, i.e. Union Station, Fredericksburg, and Broad Run.

Burt from QAN asks:

We've noticed that both VRE and Amtrak trains slowing down at Powell's Creek. What's up with the bridge? What rating does it have? Is it safe?

VRE Management:

There was recent track work done in the area and left a speed restriction. Once the proper tonnage passes over, the restriction will go away.

Shannon from Woodbridge, VA asks:

I am a monthly ticket holder that has a ticket valid from Zone 5 (Woodbridge) to Zone 2 (Alexandria). Some evenings I catch the VRE from Springfield instead of Alexandria due to my work commute and location. Do I need to be purchasing a one-way ticket from Zone 3 (Springfield) to Zone 5 (Woodbridge) or does my current monthly ticket suffice? Keep up the great work!

VRE Management:

As long as the zones on the ticket cover your trip, you're fine. In your case it does. If you wanted to ride to Quantico or L'Enfant, then it wouldn't work.

Leilani from Leeland asks:

When do VRE expect to get the second parking lot that is unpaved and loaded with rocks and dirt

paved? I have fallen several times parking in this parking lot? The lot is very unsafe especially during bad weather. Dirt and rocks during dry days is thrown in your face when customers are leaving and entering in and out of the second unpaved parking lot.

VRE Management:

The county leases that lot and we will check with them to see if they can re-grade and smooth out the lot.

App wanted from Leeland Station asks:

Is there a free app to download for the Rail Time Interactive System Map? I can't seem to find one.

VRE Management:

There are some out there but none designed by VRE.

Confused from dilusion asks:

"What I have tried to do is send the Daily Download outside the standard operating time so as to confuse riders." Good work Dale, it's working, thanks.

VRE Management:

I meant to say "so as to NOT confuse riders." I apologize.

Rene from Fredericksburg asks:

Has there been any talk about the rail road building a parking garage on the. Parking lot we use for overflow now? It seems to me it would be a money-maker esp since the city keeps raising there rates.

VRE Management:

The City of Fredericksburg has been consistent for the past few years that they do not want to build more parking lots for commuters downtown. The only long term solution is Spotsylvania building a station and lots.

David from Tappahannock VA asks:

The F'burg parking is impossible for those riding later trains. Can't VRE find some temporary spaces until Spotsy station comes on line? Perhaps you could lease 20 or so spaces in the pay lot in town, at least on a Monday through Thursday basis? It's not fair that those of us who ride the 7:15 or 7:40 trains have to pay an additional \$5/day relative to those riding earlier trains. Also, perhaps you could remind riders to be careful not to take more than a single parking space in the overflow lot? Often several more spaces could be had if earlier people were less cavalier in parking their cars.

VRE Management:

Unfortunately, paying for parking at the Sophia garage is the only short term solution.

Brian from Stafford, VA asks:

Parking at Brook is starting to become critical as there is nothing but street for overflow. The Brook Station Parking lot expansion is on the pending projects list. Is it on schedule? Any specific date yet?

VRE Management:

It is scheduled to begin construction this year and will take about a year to complete.

Doug from Broad Run asks:

It seems the upper level seats on the old style cars get loose or wobbly a lot, it makes them very unfun to sit in. Where do you stand on getting new cars and is there any chance of switching consists so that others can enjoy the old cars before they go away?

VRE Management:

Pending the commissions approval, we will place an order and see the first coaches from that order in two years.

Bill from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

I see that VRE is considering a fare increase. Before a fare increase perhaps some other savings might be explored? Suggest eliminating the butt cans and associated janitorial costs from VRE controlled platforms. There are additional benefits -- VRE will no longer support 2nd hand smoke, will no longer support a known cancer causing habit, and will no longer subject non smokers to smoke on the platform, and the sometimes ghastly, noxious odor that smokers knowingly or unknowingly bring into a railcar. PS - Keep up the fabulous customer service and on time performance.

VRE Management:

I know fare increases are never popular and I look for savings everywhere. Unfortunately I had to recommend one this year, the first time in three years. Ridership is at an all time high which requires more funding but money from all government levels seem to either be decreasing or staying the same.

John from Manassas Park asks:

Courtesy item for you to send out please. Those of us who carry purses, briefcases, gym bags, back packs etc. must be very careful that the way we sling them over shoulders etc. does not result in others being bumped and banged. Those passengers sitting next to the aisle are frequently the victims of a bang to the head as someone passes by with a bag of some sort extending past the edge of the seat.

VRE Management:

A common courtesy note from a fellow rider.

Chris from Clifton, VA asks:

Is anyone else bothered by the clicking on keyboards on the quiet car? A couple of people type the whole way in. It gets annoying when it's the only sound in the car.

VRE Management:

To clarify, VRE has Quiet Cars not Silent Cars. The periodic sounds of people sneezing, newspaper pages turning, and fingers clicking on keyboards will occur.

Jim from Fredericksburg asks:

At Fredericksburg, could one or two of the ticket kiosks be moved to the track 3 side? This would alleviate Amtrak riders from having to climb the stairs on the Track 2 side to validate their VRE ticket or purchase a step-up, and then run down, under and up again to Track 3 in order to board the train -- sometimes causing those riders to miss a train because of the extra time needed. I've also noticed that Amtrak conductors rarely check the VRE ticket, which must encourage cheating.

VRE Management:

I will consider it but our trains will show up on Track 2 almost 100% of the time. It may be an inconvenience for our riders who use the Amtrak Cross Honor trains.

mary from Richmond, VA asks:

Since VRE also receive state funds, why is this train not servicing the Richmond, VA. What is hold up
Thanks

VRE Management:

Although we receive state funds, substantial subsidies to operate the trains come from the local jurisdictions. For us to serve more counties and cities, they would have to join VRE, like Spotsylvania did a year ago.

M from Fredericksburg asks:

Could train 300 be scheduled to leave 15 minutes earlier at 0450?

VRE Management:

Our current contract with CSX does not permit that.

Phil from Burke asks:

Still waiting on the automated announcement about "last chance to switch trains" Prior to Alexandria. Every month you say it will be done. If you can't figure out how to get someone to do it then say so.

VRE Management:

It is not that simple. We have to get an ad agency to record the announcement then it has to get programmed into every car in our system. We will get it done.

Phil from Burke asks:

Are you still correcting the automated announcements from "Personnal" to "Personal" on the scrolling sign? Again you said would be done months ago. Isn't it 2012?

VRE Management:

I apologize it hasn't been fixed. I will make sure it does.

alan from fred asks:

CSX has experienced many signal problems on both VRE and MARC the past few months. Has CSX provided you with any reason for these problems? I know Sounder and Capitol corridor do not have the percentage of problems that are occurring around Washington.

VRE Management:

We operated at 98.3% system wide for the month of January, a record best, previously set in October. We did not have any signal failures on CSX in January and are pleased with their maintenance programs in our service area to prevent the delays you mention.

Manassas Rider from Manassas, VA asks:

This past summer new gates were installed at the train crossings on West and Battle Streets in Manassas. For the past several months, there have been many instances when the gates remain down with lights flashing for a long time after the train has left the station (at least 5minutes), without a train approaching. Pedestrians, bikers and motorcycles routinely go around the gates and I've even seen kids play on the rails when the signals are down. Is this caused by a malfunction in the crossing signal? Should we notify local police when this occurs?

VRE Management:

There should be a number to call Norfolk Southern on the crossing gates signs to report a malfunction. You can also notify the Manassas Police.

Joe from Fairfax asks:

I read a story on WTOP yesterday about Fairfax County planning to add 9,000 new jobs in the next year. Especially with the Bechtel Corporation. Does VRE expect more congestion in Fairfax in the next 12 months? Is VRE prepared for added congestion in Fairfax County in the next 12 months?

VRE Management:

I don't think these employees will locate near any of our stations.

Joe from Fairfax asks:

Some of my friends complain to me about congestion along Route 1 in Prince William and traffic near the new Mark Center. What is VRE doing to help them get to work? Is VRE doing enough in Prince William County and near the Alexandria Mark Center?

VRE Management:

Riders can take a train to Alexandria, then transfer to a DASH bus which serves the Mark Center.

Tom from Fairfax asks:

What does VRE feel is the biggest challenge they have to face in the next 12 months? Are there part of Virginia where you're concentrating your efforts?

VRE Management:

Biggest challenge for years is to address overcrowding and add more service. Funding the expansion will be difficult.

Tom from Fairfax asks:

I hear a lot about Dulles Rail. What role, if any, will VRE play with Metro to offer alternative ways to get to Dulles?

VRE Management:

There are no rails that go out to Dulles which is why Metro is building track to get people there. VRE cannot help move people towards Dulles.

George from Gainesville asks:

Dale, What happened this morning on 324 at Backlick Road? The train nearly overshot the entire platform. I think only 1 door was able to open. There were no announcements telling people to walk back to the open door. Most folks figured it out on their own when their door didn't open. If the brakes are wet, shouldn't the engineer take that into consideration? Most people do that when driving their cars.....

VRE Management:

I will look into it.

Julie from Pain in the Backville asks:

We all know that the old ghetto cars are going to be around for awhile. We get that. But in the mean time until the new cars arrive to replace them, something desperately needs to be done about the current seats on the old cars. 99% of the padding is gone on about 100% of the seats. I'm getting tired of sitting on a seat that feels like it's made of rebar. You tout how riding the VRE is supposed to be a relaxing experience to and from work. NEWSFLASH: It's not happening on 324 in the mornings. If this keeps up, I'm sending you my chiropractor bill.

VRE Management:

I will ask our Mechanical team about the situation to see if improvements can be made.

VRE Management:

That finishes us up for the hour. There were a lot of questions, especially about parking. With the increasing ridership, parking is becoming difficult, especially at the southern and western stations. I am trying to find solutions but it will be difficult. As many of you have mentioned, the on-time has been very good and I am committed to keep it at these levels we are experiencing and feel with the new cars,

locomotives and our relationship with the host railroads and Keolis that we should be able to sustain the service at this level.

See you next month on March 7th!

-Dale
