

# Virginia Railway Express

## Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, April 2nd at 12 noon.



There are currently 99 questions waiting to be answered.

### **VRE Management:**

Happy Spring, even though it's a little cold today. Let's just get to the questions.

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### **Fred from Fredericksburg, VA asks:**

Is there a website or publication that I could refer to that explains how to interpret the railway signals? As I wait for the train at Crystal City, I often watch the lights changing and wish I knew what they meant. Thanks for the service -- it beats I-95 any day!!

### **VRE Management:**

I do not know a specific website that I can point you to. I am sure some web surfing will lead you to one. Know that American railroad companies have little differences between them, but are basically the same.

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### **DK from Warrenton asks:**

The Broad Run parking lot is filled, once again, to overflowing. It appears that there is enough land adjoining the current lots that could be used for an expansion. Are there any plans for one?

### **VRE Management:**

We expanded the lot at Broad Run a few years ago and cannot expand any further due to the surrounding area being either a flood plain or wetland. A very long term solution is to expand service to Gainesville/Haymarket area and once accomplished, it will further relieve parking at Broad Run.

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### **Cathy from Bristow, VA asks:**

At one time, the Prince William County police maintained a presence at the Broad Run VRE lot. In recent years the number of parking spaces has increased, with a resulting increase in traffic. Is it possible to request PWC police to monitor both Piper Lane and the parking lot once more? I normally ride a.m. Train 324; arrive a good 10-15 minutes early, and still experience aggressive tailing along with drivers who refuse or forget to dim their high beams. Thank you.

### **VRE Management:**

I will ask Prince William County to increase their patrols at Broad Run.

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### **Is That Seat Taken? from Woodbridge, VA asks:**

Would it be possible for you to "lock" the seats on the upper level of the older gallery cars? It's very frustrating to see so many people flip the seatbacks and claim two single seats for themselves...especially when space is at a premium. There's even one lady who takes two seats and then converts them back to singles when her friend boards at a later stop.

### **VRE Management:**

This will largely go away as the new cars go into service. You cannot move the seatbacks on the new cars.

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**Judy from Woodbridge VA** asks:

Why do you not let passengers know of the availability of the OmniRide commuter bus service to DC and Springfield Metro from Dale City, Lake Ridge, Horner Road Commuter Lot and Rt. 234 Commuter Lot as an alternative to driving to DC when trains are up to an hour late or have been cancelled. This service has saved me from driving in many times and I always keep schedules with me.

**VRE Management:**

We recommend having alternate means of transportation. We have a link on our website under Connecting Services to PRTC to find out about bus schedules.

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**Matt Roche from Burke, VA** asks:

Hello, The good news is ridership has to be at an all time high. The bad news is we are running out of seats. Any idea on when new cars will be added to eliminate the congestion. These trains were not designed for standing passengers. The South bound Manassas train 327 is full, 329 is at capacity. With gas at 3.40 a gallon now is the time to capture these riders and keep them when gas prices dip. We can do that by supplying a superior product. By the way, overall I think you all are doing a fantastic job. Matt

**VRE Management:**

There are currently no plans to add any more cars to these trains. We will continue to monitor the ridership of these trains and adjust the trainset if needed. And thank you for your kind words, I know we must work together to improve VRE.

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

The construction of the structured parking building, as evidenced by the live webcam ([www.visitmanassas.org](http://www.visitmanassas.org)) is progressing rapidly. What is the latest completion data?

**VRE Management:**

Right now, we are hoping the Manassas garage will be complete by the end of June 2008. As we get closer, we will let you know the date.

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**Deborah from Burke, VA** asks:

Could you please give us an update on the Burke Centre parking garage? I've heard that at one point there was a delay in the delivery of the prefab concrete. Is the project back on schedule for completion in August? Also, will the clock tower have functional timekeeping, i.e., a clock on railroad time?

**VRE Management:**

We are hoping the garage will be able to be used by the end of May. construction will continue around the garage after May. The tower will have a functional timepiece, but it will no railroad time. It is not designed for that level of accuracy.

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**joe from Fredericksburg** asks:

Are there any negotiations being conducted with Amtrak to reduce the stepup fare

**VRE Management:**

I'll approach Amtrak to attempt to lower the fee. I have no idea whether I'll be successful or not.

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

Can I exchange 10 FRCs for a 10 ride ticket before July 1st?

**VRE Management:**

Our policy change went into effect last July that we will no longer exchange expiring FRCs.

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**Todd from Broad Run** asks:

I was an hour and a half late getting home when 329 stranded us at Burke Center yesterday. Now it sounds like our new locomotives are out of reach since Richmond failed to fix the Transportation Bill. Are there any signs of hope? I have started driving more often because I have evening events that I can't risk a 1-2 hour delay because the VRE locomotive broke down - again.

**VRE Management:**

We have ordered two new locomotives and the funding for the options to buy 18 more are what's in question. The general assembly meets next month and hopefully they will resolve the financing issue. In the meanwhile we have two new to us leased locomotives arriving shortly. This is the first major incident we have had in a while.

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**Jesse from Manassas Park** asks:

Why do the VRE rules allow only non-alcoholic beverages to be consumed aboard the trains? Many passengers would like to have a beer on the way home, especially those who live walking distance to the stations.

**VRE Management:**

While I understand that those who walk home from the station wouldn't pose a risk, over 80% of passengers do drive home. The Operations Board has decided there is to be no alcohol on the trains.

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**Doug** from asks:

I had a thought while i was sitting on delayed train 329 yesterday for an hour yesterday. How bout passing out cold beer instead of FRC's? It would be cheaper for VRE, quench our thirst, make the wait more barable, and they dont expire! What is there not to love?

**VRE Management:**

While we are on the subject, this has been suggested to us many times. While it probably would be cheaper, our board simply won't go for it.

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**Joe from Crystal City** asks:

Will we still have a Broadrun Station after the Gainesville Station Opens.

**VRE Management:**

Yes it will remain open.

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**Bryon from Crystal City** asks:

Rather than using all the money to expand the Manassas Line should the VRE use that money on locomotives?

**VRE Management:**

I wish it were that easy but the funding is coming being provided by the rail enhancement fund and cannot be used for equipment.

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**Ron from Woodbridge VA** asks:

on 3 day and holiday weekends, why don't the earlier trains(example Crystal City 3:47 pm) add cars). The earlier trains are always standing room only.

**VRE Management:**

We do this for major holidays such as Independence Day and Labor Day. But we have to look at overall ridership. We put the biggest set where it will be needed the most.

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**Kyle from Rippon** asks:

What's the difference in funding between VRE and MARC where they can run three lines (with PENN going north/south all day and late into the evening) versus VRE's situation?

**VRE Management:**

MARC is operated by a Maryland State agency and provided substantial funding from the state. VRE is a local

operation with funding from eight local jurisdictions. We receive state money which is not as much as MARC gets.

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**Davin from Woodbridge, VA** asks:

1) What is the construction project at Crystal City? 2) Is the storage yard at L'Enfant completed and if so when will VRE begin using it?

**VRE Management:**

1) CSX is adding a third main line from just south of the Potomac River bridge to just north of Alexandria.

2) All track work is completed, we still have to put in two power stands. If we add additional service, we will use those storage tracks.

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**Don from Lorton, VA** asks:

What does VRE plan to do with the Kawaski's? Repair them or sell them? I like that you took them off Train #307

**VRE Management:**

We solicited offers on our website to sell the Kawasakis. We are evaluating whether to keep them or sell them.

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**Tom from Manassas, Va** asks:

Are you aware that Train 327 is almost never on time? That is, it arrives, at the earliest in Manassas at 4:56 and typically later. It typically leaves Union Station a few minutes late and loses time the whole way, when Trains 329 and 331 take 55 minutes or so to get to Manassas, Train 327 takes longer. Cumulatively, this is more than one-half hour per week and over 26 hours per year. Problems could be slow release by conductors at stops, heavy train with anemic locomotive, or all of the above. Plus, I have never, not even once, seen tickets checked. What do you intend to do about it?

**VRE Management:**

I know your time is valuable and every minute on a delayed train could be better spent elsewhere. We will keep on eye on the performance of trains.

I can also say that our conductors have been doing a fine job with ticket checks recently so much so that complaints about conductors not ticket checking has reduced drastically.

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**Kal from Warrenton** asks:

I dont know which 327 train he is riding but I have been riding it for 9 months now and I have never seen it full. You just have to move toward the back of the train. Lots of seats.

**VRE Management:**

Here's a suggestion from a fellow passenger.

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**Carrie from f'burg** asks:

Any plans for rail service further south of F'burg?

**VRE Management:**

Not at this time.

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**Kathy from Bristow, VA** asks:

So, your answer to "what can be done to further provide parking at Broad Run" is: wait 10 years until VRE runs service to Gainesville?" If that's our only hope, it's pretty discouraging. What about a feeder bus system - maybe

down Linton Hall?

**VRE Management:**

I know it is discouraging but all solutions require a substantial amount of funds we do not have.

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**Deb** from **Fredericksburg** asks:

When will the Fredericksburg Station be Fixed? I heard Fredericksburg received money for repairs a year or so ago and am curious as to when this will be done and what exactly will be done. Thank you!

**VRE Management:**

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**DEB** from **Fredericksburg** asks:

Good Afternoon! Who is responsible for keep our county beautiful along the rail ways? I have notice more and more trash along the rail ways and it is appalling.

**VRE Management:**

I will contact CSX to look into this.

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**Jim** from **F`burg** asks:

I don't believe the CEO's answer to the Potomac Bridge question was answered properly. IS THERE A PROBLEM WITH THE POTOMIC CREEK BRIDGE? IF THERE IS, WHAT IS IT? IF NOT, WHY HAVE THE VRE TRAINS BEEN SLOWING BEFORE THE BRIDGE FOR OVER SIX-MONTHS NOW?

**VRE Management:**

Last month I knew that CSX would be coming through and resurfacing the tracks in our service area. As it turns out, the resurfacing team will be working on track 3 south of Rippon. I will talk to CSX and find out what the problem with the Potomac Creek Bridge is and what can be done to resolve it.

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**Eddie** from **F`Burg** asks:

Regarding the March 20 VRE update, CSX is resurfacing track #3 north of F`Burg. Why not track #2, which is the one VRE uses? There is still a speed restriction over the small bridge between Booke and Leeland. What is taking so long to fix this? It has been about 6 months since the trains have traveled at regular speed over the bridge.

**VRE Management:**

I am not sure why they chose to resurface track 2 but as I said I will ask about this bridge.

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**JOSEPH** from **fredericksburg** asks:

You all know how THESE PEOPLE are so sensitive to their seating and fellow fare paying passengers risk being "told off" because some of THESE PEOPLE are not as courteous and respectful of other as we need thme to be. THESE PEOPLE do not sit next to the window, look at you as if you are infringing on their space when you ask if anyone is sittign next to them, or put their personal items on the seat beside yet they see the train is so full. You could open up more already existing seating on these trains if your crew would get THESE PEOPLE to not hoard the seat.

**VRE Management:**

Another courtesy reminder from a fellow rider. Also, if you have trouble finding a seat, ask a conductor, they can tell you where available seats are.

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**Ron from Bristow, VA** asks:

Because the legislature voted down the transportation bill, does VRE have other possible funding sources, such as a bond issue that could raise much needed capital to purchase locomotives? Again last evening, 329 and 331 passengers had a very long night, thanks to the unwillingness of Richmond to respond to VRE's needs.

**VRE Management:**

General Assembly will go into special assembly in May to attempt to replace the transportation bill that was found unconstitutional. Hopefully we will have good news in May or June.

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**Esther from Fredericksburg** asks:

Who is responsible for setting the temperature controls on the train -- yard maintenance or conductors? Yesterday (3/31) on train 309 (third car from the front), it was so cold I spent the entire 90 minutes with coat buttoned and gloves on reading -- it was too cold to sleep.

**VRE Management:**

The temperature is programmed by maintenance personnel to stay between 68-72 degrees. I will have the mechanical team look into this.

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**Fred from Fairfax** asks:

Dale, we all have a gazillion ways to tell time these days, so the clock tower at Burke will probably go down in history as the last one ever built. Why not install a Jumbotron in the tower instead of a clock? That way we could watch the news and/or sports while waiting for the train. When no trains were coming, a clock face could be projected to satisfy the architectural purists. What do you say?

**VRE Management:**

If you can find me the money I would be willing to do it.

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**Kim from Lorton, VA** asks:

The new consist for Train #300 changed over the past week or so, but it seems that we now have less total seats, less vacant seats, and more people standing. Is that what your conductors and others are reporting, or is it just me? Thanks, Kim

**VRE Management:**

There are fewer seats, we are looking to improve the situation. I am told that there are normally seats on the North end of this train.

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

This is a two part question. 1) Is there any possibility of a timeline as to when work on the Haymarket Station will begin? 2) Is it possible to have someone come out to the Broad Run Station and PLEASE re-do the lines on the parking lot? People are sometimes taking up two spaces because of the way the lines are in the main lot and that doesn't seem fair to everyone.

**VRE Management:**

1) Preliminary work on the extension started last week. We should have a report in one year on environmental and alternative analysis.

2) We are working to have VDOT to restripe the lot, no dates confirmed yet.

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**RJ from Spotsy** asks:

When will we see the results of the 2007 Passenger survey?

**VRE Management:**

The 2007 Passenger Survey was an online survey; problems with that deemed it statistically invalid by our analysis team and the results will not be published.

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**fredrider** from **fredericksburg va** asks:

This is my third attempt to get you to answer this: Why oh Why can't the speakers volume be lowered? Several of them are much too loud for normal hearing (almost painful). This seems like an easy fix, but conductors tell me its not possible. Also, last month, you 'answered' a question about some guy picking his nose in the gallery car...How about staying with something a bit more worthwhile this time?

**VRE Management:**

The speaker issue is intermittent and is not occuring in every car. To help us spend our time wisely please submit a Train Information Form or email us with the specific train and car at [gotrains@vre.org](mailto:gotrains@vre.org)

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**Mike** from **Spotsy** asks:

Love the new cars. Now that you have so many, how long 'til we can bring bikes on the train?

**VRE Management:**

Once all the new cars are in operation, I will look at the bike policy.

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**RP** from **Spotsylvania** asks:

Why is there so much animosity by riders and VRE regarding riders from Spotsylvania? Some people in previous forums refer to our county as "Spotsyltuky." VRE restricts our parking. You have no problem wasting Commonwealth and Federal tax monies... Which by the way WE also pay. We can't help it that our Supervisors don't like the way VRE is doing things.

**VRE Management:**

I do not have animosity towards any of our riders. While VRE does receive money from Virginia and the federal government, the fact is that participating jurisdictions subsidize the majority of VRE to the tune of \$13.4 million per year. Spotsylvania ranks fourth in the number of riders but contributes no money.

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**Bill** from **Fburg** asks:

When poeple take up two seats with their stuff I just turn and talk to the pearson across from them and I FART, It doen't get me the seat but I feel better

**VRE Management:**

WOW!

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**Frank** from **Leeland** asks:

As we crossed the Occoquan on this rainy Tuesday morning, I couldn't help but look at all the chumps sitting on I95 watching their wipers move while their cars didn't. VRE ain't perfect, but it is SO much better than the alternative. Thanks for doing a great job!

**VRE Management:**

Thank you for the kind words.

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**Jim** from **Fredericksburg, Va** asks:

What happened to the comfortable seats that were suppose to be incorporated into the new rail cars? I arrive at work feeling like I have been beat up. The seats are hard and do not provide proper back support.

**VRE Management:**

We put a lot of research into the interior of the cars. I am sorry to hear you are displeased. There are a lot of riders who enjoy the new Gallery cars.

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**David** from **Manassas, VA** asks:

Are you aware that the puzzle in the update paper today is messed up? The clues in no way match the grid. You

should have someone do a proof read of the puzzle before printing.

**VRE Management:**

Sorry for the mix up. We will be running the puzzle with the correct clues the next issue.

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**Markus from Fredericksburg, VA.** asks:

Have you considered creating report to show what if's? eg. What if the VRE did nto exist what would be the current hit to the Intersate Traffic, What would be the amount of Increased Fuel Usage... etc...

**VRE Management:**

We have not considered creating a report but we do know VRE takes a lane of traffic off of I-95 and I-66 during peak rush hours.

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**Billy from Manassas** asks:

I see the train cars are going to the Fredericksburg line again. They are 2 kaw and 2 new gallery trains on the F line. Manassas line only has 1 (one) new train set. Why is that? The old gallery cars are a joke and new equipment should be evenly distributed!!

**VRE Management:**

We take a look at our system as a whole by rearranging the equipment the way we did we should be able to run that 8 car train with one locomotive releasing an extra locomotive to be used for the rest of the fleet.

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**Sue from Woodbridge, VA** asks:

Train 304 has been 5-10 minutes every morning so far this week either due to late arriving equipment and/or track activity. What's up? Gentle reminder to the other riders - stop being rude. The taking up the seats and treating handicapped people or people with injuries badly and making them stand is really getting out of hand.

**VRE Management:**

Even though a train may initially experience delays, it may make up time to its end destination. We have to share the tracks with other trains on the rail, and that is the nature of railroading.

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Another courtesy reminder from a fellow rider – be mindful of those less fortunate than you.

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**Rob from Frederickburg, VA** asks:

How come the cars are so cold in the morning it seems that it is a little too early to turn on the Air Conditioning?

**VRE Management:**

There are ventilation systems that regularly introduce fresh air, which in the mornings happen to be a little cold. Without this system, the commute would be a rather stuffy one.

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**Rob from Broad Run** asks:

There seems to be a lot of people leaving their portable GPS and Satellite Radios in their cars in plain sight. I just wanted to remind people to take those down and out of sight.

**VRE Management:**

Thanks for the tip. Before, expensive car radios were a big target for theft, now GPS systems seem to be a hot commodity.

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**Randy from Burke Centre** asks:

There are currently 4 bus routes in Burke while the parking garage is being built. Understand two busses "Library" and "Church" will stop running when the Parking Garage opens. But what about the other two, "North" and

"South", will they continue to run? If there are no plans to keep them going what if there are enough riders that want to continue to ride a bus instead of driving? I recommend a survey of the current riders be conducted to see how many people would like to continue to ride a bus on the current or expanded "North" and "South" routes even if we had to pay to ride.

**VRE Management:**

Fairfax County funds the EZ bus routes. There has been no final word regarding any of the service routes after the garage is completed. I suspect they will monitor the ridership of the routes after completion to see which, if any, they want to keep in service.

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**Danielle from Manassas, VA** asks:

I would love some additional later trains (there's always talk about earlier ones!) for when we need to go in an hour or so later for a doctor appt. or simply when you miss the train. This is especially true for delayed openings. Many of us follow the government schedule so that's a lot of people commuting in two hours later than usual. But the latest option for me is 8am from MP! This doesn't just mean issues with school delays, but also my having to either miss work or get on the road and drive in when conditions are already unfavorable. Can't we run a 'snow delay' train on those rare days?

**VRE Management:**

We have plans to add more service similar to your suggestion, unfortunately, due to financing issues, we may have to wait a little longer before we can do it.

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**James from Falmouth** asks:

Any chance on cleaning the inside windows ? I'm tired of looking at the scenery through the fog of someone else's greasy head print.

**VRE Management:**

There are crews that walk the trains daily to clean as needed. Deep cleaning of the interior is completed every six months.

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**Eric from Bristow** asks:

I enjoyed "It's So Nice to be Nice" courtesy campaign cartoons. They are humor. Speeding in the parking lots is my favorite.

**VRE Management:**

Thanks, I will pass that on to our Marketing Manager, I am sure she will appreciate it. We hope that everyone learns serious lessons from our comedic campaign.

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**Jim from F-Burg** asks:

How much money has VRE saved since they changed the 30 minute delay policy to one hour for the free ride certificate?

**VRE Management:**

There has been substantial savings from the changes to the FRC program, enough so that we don't foresee having to eliminate it altogether.

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**Randy from Bristow VA** asks:

When the VRE calculates their published on-time performance, what is the tolerance (in minutes) of a train being classified as being late at its destination when a train does not arrive at its published scheduled time?

**VRE Management:**

If a train arrives at its end destination within 5 minutes of its scheduled time, it is considered on-time.

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**David from Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

I catch the train in Fredericksbrug. Good weather is around the corner and soon there will be atleast 20 motorcycles taking up 20 automobile parking places, in Fredericksburg alone. These 20 bikes could easily occupy the area of only 6 or 7 places adjoining one another. Why not designate Motorcycle Only parking and help to alleviate the already diminished parking available in the VRE parking lots. Every VRE station should consider this change, I'm not just asking for myself!

**VRE Management:**

I'll look into designating a space for motorcycles.

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**Thom from Lorton, VA asks:**

I asked this question previously, but I'm not sure what VRE can do . . . I use the Lorton Station and with the development of the Lorton Town Center, the builing of more residential units; and the use of Lorton Station Boulevard to "cut" around I-95 bottle-necks, there is now a lot of traffic in the evenings. When it is really bad, you can wait almost 2o minutes just to turn left. It's also getting dangerous with many residents crossing the street where ever want. Can VRE work with Fairfax County to monitor the traffic and possibly come up with a solution?

**VRE Management:**

There is not much we can do, however we will forward your comment on to Fairfax County DOT to see if they can look at the problem.

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**Jose from Mechanicsville, VA asks:**

Concerning the vending machines, when was the last time the touch screens were serviced? I and many others have a difficult time trying to use them. We touch with one finger, multiple fingers, and sometimes our nuckles to get the screen to respond. Sometimes I feel like using my toes. This refers to the machines at Fred'g and Crystal City. Thanks. By the way, thanks for the new trains - my 2.5 hour commute is more comfortable.

**VRE Management:**

We have several machines that need new touch screens. I have been told the parts will be delivered this week and then we will start replacing the malfunctioning screens. By the way, I am glad you like the new trains.

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**VRE Management:**

Our time is up. You had a lot of good questions and I am sorry I couldn't get to them all. Meet the Management starts tonight at Washington Union Station. I will not be there but, I will be at L'Enfant next week, and Crystal City in two weeks. I hope I can answer more questions. See you on the platform.

The next On-Line Forum is May 7.

-Dale

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