

Virginia Railway Express

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, May 7th at 12 noon.



There are currently 103 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Welcome back!

I hope you all had a chance to fill out our survey today. Our Annual Customer Opinion Survey is another important tool for us to gather your input on our service.

Since I was up earlier this morning helping with the survey, I may be answering your questions a little slower. But, we will see how we do!

Fred from Manassas, Va asks:

What is the status of the new locomotives and the expanded service, the later Manassas morning train ?

VRE Management:

We have ordered two brand new locomotives, which we are likely not to be in service for two years. As stated before, we are waiting for the outcome of a special legislative session this summer to determine the availability of funding for additional locomotives and service.

Aaron from Fredericksburg VA asks:

Will you be putting signs up for the rude people on the train to let people know when the need to get up rather than push there way in.

VRE Management:

I will put this in a Courtesy Announcement.

Beatrice from Fredericksburg asks:

Hi Any news yet on whether an earlier train will depart from Fredericksburg?

VRE Management:

We are waiting for the outcome of a special Virginia legislative session this summer to determine the availability of additional funding for transit.

Doug from Burke asks:

What's the latest on a Jumbotron for Burke garage's clock tower? And what's the latest guess on when the garage will be open?

VRE Management:

If the residents of Burke want a Jumbotron and raise funds for it, I am all for it. The parking garage is expected to open this June.

Tim from Fairfax, VA asks:

Why does VRE offer reduced fares for seniors, and for that matter for the disabled (without sounding ruthless)? For instance, when I sit next to a senior with a reduced fare ticket, they are going to the same paying job that I am, aren't they? So why do they contribute less to the VRE?

VRE Management:

We are required by the FTA to have discounts for seniors and disabled during non-peak hours. Since we have limited off-peak service, we have chosen to allow the discounts all day.

Jim from F-burg, VA asks:

Why can't your conductors be consistent with unloading, or at least tell us they are changing which cars will open? Case in point: 307 last night. For weeks, the first two cars don't open, and all the rest do. Last night (May 5th)--the bloody last car on the platform DID NOT open so we all had to stand around waiting, waiting, until it became obvious. We were notified? Nope. Typical lousy customer service. [Note: Lori Hargrove is the best about announcing which cars will --and won't-- be opening. Not sure she was on last night.]

VRE Management:

Different circumstances warrant which doors will be opened, for example mechanical difficulties or train length vs. platform length, etc. I will talk to Amtrak to get our conductors to announce which doors are opening.

Ralph from Dumfries, VA asks:

For future fare increases, how about raising fares more for the outlying stations whose counties don't contribute to the regional transportation pool. If the counties won't pay, then have the citizens contribute their fair share.

VRE Management:

Counties and cities already contribute subsidies based on ridership from their jurisdictions. And those counties beyond the VRE system do not have to contribute unless they join the VRE.

Joe from Fredericksburg asks:

It appears that the new trains do hold as many passengers as the older car. What are the capacities

VRE Management:

Depending on whether or not the new car has a bathroom, the capacity is only reduced 6-18 seats. Sometimes it just takes time for people to adjust.

Joe from Spotsy asks:

Any news on Spotsy joining the family.

VRE Management:

No change in status. No indication that they will join VRE.

Rose from Triangle, VA asks:

I ride the 304 from Quantico to Franconia/Springfield. For the last two weeks+, this train is late arriving at Franconia (7:15AM). Is the track work affecting the arrival time? It's costing me more money because I miss the Fairfax Connector bus had have to take the Metro to Van Dorn. Thank you

VRE Management:

While there are still restrictions, some have been removed and CSX is working on the rest.

JB from Bealeton asks:

What can we do to encourage the VRE to get service to Bealeton. What is the secret code.

VRE Management:

Talk with your local supervisor. Fauquier will have to join VRE for service to be extended south of Broad Run.

D from **Burke** asks:

I'd like to use some statistics on energy usage when I communicate with elected officials about VRE. So: (1) what is the average fuel use per passenger per day, and (2) what is the average passenger trip length? Thanks for the good service!

VRE Management:

I'm not sure I can come up with those figures off of the top of my head. If you email your question to Gotrains@vre.org, we will work on getting you the answer.

Dave from **Springfield, VA** asks:

1) Why doesn't Train #307 have 2 locomotives anymore? What is the difference between pushing/pulling 8 Kawasaki vs. 8 Gallery cars? 2) Are locomotives V35 & V36 on the Manassas line? I've not seen them on the Fredericksburg line.

VRE Management:

Eight Kawasakis are substantially heavier than eight Gallery cars. The Kawasakis also draw more power.

The V35 is operating test runs, but is not in revenue service yet.

Joe from **Fredericksburg** asks:

Is there any negotiation being conducted with Amtrak to lower the \$10 Step Up ticket

VRE Management:

I'm still working the issue. I'm not sure it can be changed.

Davin from **Woodbridge, VA** asks:

I was looking at train pictures on Flickr and saw that CalTrain has similar gallery cars to VRE's new ones. However, the front of the cars have no seats because they are designated as bike racks. Why didn't VRE do that and when will VRE allow bikes?

VRE Management:

We will consider allowing bikes on board when all of the new Gallery cars are in service.

Lisa from **Warrenton, VA** asks:

Will there be VRE service on the 4th of July? Since it's a Friday this year, I'd think there'd be more interest in going downtown.

VRE Management:

We will not be offering any service on the 4th of July.

Lou from **Stafford, VA** asks:

I am a long time rider and one of your original riders. I know the conductors already have a full time job with train management. They do a great job checking tickets, keep up the good work!!!! Can someone remind the VRE riders that seats are for people to sit in and two seats do not constitute a bed? It is discouraging on a crowded train to have folks using two seats as a bed or using the adjoining seat as a placeholder for their personal items.

VRE Management:

A typical courtesy issue. I will continue to work with Amtrak to have our crews be more responsive.

keith from **burke** asks:

why is it taking so long to...1. get a later a.m. and p.m. train...and 2. to replace the older cars?

VRE Management:

1. With the elimination of the HB 3202 funding, I don't when I will be able to add more trains. I'm still waiting for

the General Assembly to schedule a special session.

2. We are receiving five new cars a month. Half of them are in service and we will continue to remove older cars from service as new ones come in. All new cars should be in service by this October.

Marc from F-burg asks:

In response to an inquiry in forum earlier this year, you stated you would contact CSX to determine the nature of the (still continuing as of today) Slow Order running from just south of the Daffan Curve to just north of the Potomac Creek bridge. What was the CSX response?

VRE Management:

I did and a number of the slow orders have been removed. the one to which you are referring is more difficult to remedy because it is near a bridge.

Bill from Manassas, VA asks:

The train ride is typically pleasant but there are a few small things, depending on what train/car you are on, that can spoil the ride. These would be slamming doors between cars, squeaks that can sound like fingernails on chalkboards, and dirty windows. I think a little maintenance in these areas could make for a more pleasant ride. Thanks for listening...

VRE Management:

To help us maintain our trains, we need specifics. If you see something wrong with a train, please fill out a Train Information Form on our website. That has the specific questions we need answered to investigate problems.

Tom from Fredericksburg asks:

One thing that I am not happy about is: No VRE service on the day after Thanksgiving. Could there not be just one train heading north and one south just for that one day? I feel that I am being robbed when I am forced to use other transport for work on that day when I had already paid for a monthly ticket.

VRE Management:

Due to popular demand, we will run trains on an "S" schedule on the day after Thanksgiving this year. For those of you who will miss out on "Black Friday" shopping, you will be able to take the train to work.

Lauren from Burke, VA asks:

Any news on the trackwork schedule changes for 5/30? Thanks!

VRE Management:

We should be ready to make a formal announcement by no later than this Friday.

Kenny from Casanova asks:

I've been submitting questions for years now and they never get posted. Are these question scripted? I'm thinking American Idol...

VRE Management:

Until Paula Abdul is sitting next to me, this is not American Idol!

JOE from STAFFORD,VA asks:

How much authority does a conductor really have?

VRE Management:

The conductor is the authority on the train.

Bill from Fredericksburg asks:

What is the status of the leased engines that were to be here last year?

VRE Management:

We have introduced one into service last week. The other two need additional work before they are put into service.

John from Crystal City asks:

When will know what the new fair is going to be?

VRE Management:

The fare increase has been approved by our board and our parent commissions. I will make sure that the new fares will be posted on our web site today.

Roger from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

The morning trains line up the very first car at the front of the Crystal City station platform and have the last 3 cars off the platform. This increases the time at the station since the last 4 cars have to exit at one point. Why not center the trains cars on the platform (all the new gallery cars now have wheelchair lifts)?

VRE Management:

Not all the trains have new Gallery cars. I may revisit this policy once the new cars are all in service. Until then, to be consistent, all wheelchair passengers will be boarded at the northernmost car.

Way. L from Fred., VA asks:

On Monday 05/05/2008, train 309 was late for more than a hour at Leeland, and there was no FRC distributed, how do we get it?

VRE Management:

From what I understand, the conductors did hand out some FRCs. However, I know that they were not able to hand them out to everyone.

If you were missed, please send in an FRC Request form -- <http://www.vre.org/programs/freeride.htm> on our web site -- to our office.

Randy from Burke Centre VA asks:

Concerning "Rail Time", it is great but got one recommendation to improve it. Please move the Interactive System Map to the "top left" or first part of the page. It is now on the last part of the page. Reason: The time that we use Rail Time the most is enroute to or waiting at the train station, using our PDAs. The way the Rail Time page is built, the important part, the map is at the bottom of the page which forces us to have to scroll down each time the page refreshes, every minute. That becomes a pain. If it was moved to be the first part of the page, problem solved for all PDA users.

VRE Management:

Good idea! I'll start looking into it.

Sharon from Clifton asks:

There are passengers using reduced fare cards that do not qualify for reduced fares. This is because vendors don't ask for official i.d.'s such as student, senior, or disabled when purchased. Also, the conductors do not ask for the i.d. (mostly because they would have to look very carefully for the "reduced price" on the ticket). At a minimum, the tickets should be marked with a distinctive mark or color so that the conductors can easily identify them as reduced and then ask for the appropriate i.d.

VRE Management:

Thank you for your idea and we will keep it under consideration when we upgrade our fare collection system.

DEB from Fredericksburg asks:

What did they say? 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.

VRE Management:

CSX has thousands of miles of track that they maintain. If there is a specific area that you wish to see addressed, please send an email to gotrains@vre.org, and we will forward it on.

Greg from Springfield Va asks:

I read in the most recent VRE Update article "Brrr, Its Cold! or is it? Although I usually agree with management's calls on fare increases, strict rule enforcement, et al., I do not agree that its necessary, desireable, or fuel efficient to keep the new Gallery cars set to between 68 and 72 degrees. It does not make sense to have to wear a coat on the train when its hot outside. I urge you to raise the temperature settings by at least 1-2 degrees (at least during the summer) for rider comfort and so that jackets won't be necessary. Thanks.

VRE Management:

During the summer months, the temperature difference should not be significant enough to warrant heavy jackets and scarves inside the train.

Debora from Fredericksburg asks:

Announce: People letting the doors slam shut. Nothing like being woken up by a door slamming shut. It sounds like someone just shot a gun. Please, please, please, hold the door and close it softly behind you. I promise all stop shoot you daggers with my looks. for some of us, this is the only time we can get some down time. Thank you so much!

VRE Management:

Another courtesy reminder from a fellow rider.

Doug from Marshall asks:

I'm planning to retire in 2012 or so. Is there any hope of my riding VRE from Haymarket before then?

VRE Management:

We have just begun environmental impact studies in the Haymarket area. It could be at least four years before service is initiated.

Woody from Manassas asks:

Reference the 'dead' csx freight on the 6th. Didn't the dispatchers promise you that freights would not be pushed into the commuter zone and slow up the traffic like that?

VRE Management:

The freight train went into emergency once at the Alexandria station and was not pushed there. Unfortunately, traffic had to proceed more slowly around the disabled train.

Mike from Fredericksburg asks:

Train 300 used to run with 2 engines. Why no longer? I remember on at least 2 occasions when we needed that second engine.

VRE Management:

When train 300 was a Kawasaki set, it needed the two locomotives that generated the required voltage, to keep the heating and lighting systems on in all the cars. Now that it is a Gallery set, it no longer requires the higher voltage locomotives and can use one locomotive. Using just one locomotive saves fuel.

Roger from Manassas asks:

The new passenger cars are clean and comfortable. However the climate control systems are poorly designed. The explanation in the recent new letter of "blowing air" makes it feel colder was helpful, but doesn't fix the problem of cold temperatures and extreme temperature fluctuations - even on main level. How can the problem be addressed or should we plan to wear coats year-round in these cars?

VRE Management:

Wow! There are a lot of comments on the HVAC systems in the new cars. The only thing I can say is that they are working as designed. In order to provide ventilation to the whole car, the blowers must remain on.

JB from Bealeton asks:

I just want everyone to know that I love my VRE and the service that they provide. I would have to get a new job if they were not there. However, because I live in Fauquire County and my BOS and PRTC can't agree, my county will not be a member anytime soon. In order to help the VRE I buy my gas in Gainesville when I can and I pay the gas tax. If you want to complain to some one please write to Paul McCulla and the Fauquier County Board of Supervisors, 40 Culpeper Street, Warrenton, VA 20186 and ask them to join. Espically if you live in the county.

VRE Management:

I have received a lot of comments from those living in outlying jurisdictions. I know many of you would instantly support your locality joining VRE. Please do what you can to have your voice heard.

Tom from F-Burg asks:

I am not happy with your new train cars. The seats are not comfortable after the first thirty minutes. It is very difficult to use a laptop and get some work accomplished. It seems that what is needed is: A car with the seats from the Mafersa car, the doors from the Sounder car, and the shocks from a Kawasaki car.

VRE Management:

Your ideal rail car sounds like a mythological creature! But, certainly our customers deserve the best of everything.

John from Crystal City asks:

I want you to know I am glad that Fare on the VRE went up. I dont want to loose this service. Thanks

VRE Management:

It's always nice to end on a happy note! From what I heard at public meetings, you are not alone.

VRE Management:

Well, that's all I have time for today!

There were plenty of excellent questions and I've got plenty of things to look into.

I look forward to chatting with you again on June 4th.

Until then,

Dale

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