

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, August 6th at 12:00pm. Click on the "ASK" Button below to submit a question.



There are currently 10 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Welcome to the monthly on-line forum. Thanks to everyone for riding our "Firecracker Special" trains on July 4, 2014. The event was a success and everyone had a good time. We plan on doing this event next year which will be on a Saturday, July 4, 2015. Groundbreaking for Potomac Shores took place on July 31st and groundbreaking for Spotsylvania will take place on August 12th. We look forward to advancing those projects.

We have a full house today: in the studio is Chris Henry- Director of Rail Operations , Jeremy Flores- Manager of Operations and Communications, Gregg Baxter- General Manager Keolis , Brian Barton- CSX Trainmaster and Greg Deibler - Manager of Systems Safety.

Now on to the questions.

Doug from Burke asks:

The exit from the Burke Center garage generally works very well, with almost all motorists obeying the rules of the road and acting considerately. However, there's one particular rider on 327 who tries to immediately change lanes once he charges through the stop sign where the exit becomes two lanes. He seeks to change lanes through the solid white line, and does not use his turn signal. If someone is already in the lane he is seeking to enter, he demonstrates a road rage type of action, using his horn, screaming, and gesturing with hands and one particular finger. Please ask him to chill.

VRE Management:

We will send out a courtesy reminder to drivers and have already engaged law enforcement to keep an eye out.

Rick from Spotsylvania, VA asks:

When is the Spotsylvania station opening?

VRE Management:

Track work for the new Spotsylvania station is currently underway. A groundbreaking ceremony is scheduled for August 12th. We'll have a better target opening date once that has occurred.

Chad from Burke, VA asks:

It is really inconvenient that there is an afternoon gap in the train schedule departing Union Station - nothing that leaves during the 2:00 hour. Is it possible to add another train to the schedule? Sometimes the 1:00 trains are too early but the 3:30 trains are too late. Thanks.

VRE Management:

Our goal is to add a Fredericksburg train by the end of the year. The specific schedule has not been determined, but we will try to put it in a slot that makes sense for many riders.

Gary from Bristow, VA asks:

What is the point of "Quiet Cars" if: 1) the stop and other announcements are blaring in them; 2) the conductors walk through and literally yell for people to show them their tickets; 3) the conductors speak loudly (not whisper by any means) to other conductors and passengers (and not only speaking about tickets) and 4) the conductors have their radios/walkie talkies on full blast so we can hear all the internal announcements as well just when they walk in the quiet car. I know some things cannot be controlled, but courtesy with radios, announcements, talking etc. would go a long way.

VRE Management:

While we ask Conductors to be cognizant of the Quiet Car rules, we will continue to play announcements, for safety. The Conductors' radios will still need to be at a volume they can hear.

robert from Potomac Shores asks:

Glad to see the ceremonial ground breaking for the PS Station. Ready to see some construction though! What's the status of the Rippon stair repairs and Lorton platform? Also, still need to update the Web Capitol Improvements page - still shows Franconia as "almost done."

VRE Management:

A refurbishment of the Rippon station should begin soon. This will include painting as well as concrete and steel repair work. The stairs will be done as a separate project following shortly after the refurbishment. The Franconia project has not been closed out due to some paperwork issues, though the work is done. VRE awarded a construction contract to Hammerhead Construction of Dulles, Virginia for the Lorton Platform project. The Notice to Proceed is pending. This project will extend the existing platform by approximately 256 feet to accommodate longer VRE trains.

Ray from Fredericksburg asks:

Who do we need to petition to get a 3-way stop sign at the corner of Sofia and Lafayette? Folks coming out of the Fredericksburg lot fly around that corner. What's it going to take to get something done a fatal accident?

VRE Management:

We will continue to work with the Fredericksburg police department to have this monitored.

RJ from Franconia asks:

Do different conductors have different rules when it comes to people standing in the vestibule? I watch the train go by Franconia-Springfield and see half of train 300's vestibules are empty while the last 2 cars the conductor seems to be holding court. I'd hate to see the liability bill if there was an accident.

VRE Management:

We will speak with the Conductors on 300 about this.

Jill from Springfield, VA asks:

What is going on with the lack of maintenance at Rolling Road? The speakers do not work so announcements cannot be heard. Now the steps at the southern end of the station are crumbling. One of the metal bars on a step came up and was removed, but now the step is not stable. What are the plans for addressing these issues?

VRE Management:

The audio at Rolling Road will be looked into by our IT department. Our Facilities' Manager has informed us that concrete work will take place this weekend to address the stairs issue.

Bob from Spotsy asks:

I'm seeing a lot of work going on along the tracks between Mine Rd. and Mills Dr. Are the tracks being extended out that far for the Spotsy station?

VRE Management:

Yes, a third track is being installed that will go all the way to the Spotsylvania Station.

Standing from Fredericksburg asks:

Standing up half the way home is getting old. When will there be more cars or seat.

VRE Management:

See earlier asked question about one additional Fredericksburg train.

Steve from Falmouth asks:

What's up with all the alien creatures in the Leeland Station parking lot last week? They really did create a nuisance and a dangerous distraction fluttering around the parking lot like moths. Does Stafford County issue permits for this nefarious activities? Who really controls the lot: Stafford County or VRE? If VRE does, then do something about the Stafford Canyons that have developed in the Primmer Road backwoods egress road. I saw a little Honda disappear in a rut this week.

VRE Management:

Groups that request the use of our facilities are required to submit a Right of Entry application. If you notice specific groups that are behaving in an unsafe manner please report that to us immediately. Stafford County controls the gravel lot but we will work with them to get it re-graded

Bob from Burke asks:

Hello. Most of the coaches are creaking like old stage coaches. They sound like the suspension springs. Others have mentioned this and you keep asking what specific coaches are involved. They all are. Interesting data point is that the newly delivered coaches have no creaking whatsoever. So it must be a maintenance issue. Again please don't ask what coaches are creaking. Ride any of them yourself.

VRE Management:

We are already addressing this issue.

Jack from Rolling road asks:

The train pulls up and it smells like poo. All of the trains. Regulars have accepted it but the tourists make some embarrassing comments. VRE should care. This was a problem two years ago and after enough complaints about the VRE smelling like bad ass you rectified it. All of the trains. Don't ask specific train numbers. The conductors talk about it also. So either they aren't reporting it, maintenance is ignoring them or VRE doesn't care. Does management not ride the train or does management not have noses?

VRE Management:

This is biochemically treated grey water that can be recycled and returned into the environment. The grey water is naturally designed to seep over the tank when full, and will naturally seep more based on the motion and how level the train is. The discharged valve of the tank is not timed or controlled and it discharges cleaned water randomly.

The smell is usually the by-product of the chemical reaction resulting from the train's waste treatment process. We will have our mechanical crews look into this further to make sure the chemicals are at the proper levels to minimize the smell.

scott from fredericksburg, va asks:

Will the new Spotsy Station have only one entry/exit point to roads? I know there will be a north exit out onto Route 17 but will there be another exit to county roads on the south side? It takes me 10 minutes to get out of the large Fredericksburg lot due to 2 of the 3 exits out being blocked.

VRE Management:

The parking lot will exit only onto Crossroads Parkway.

Adam from Port Royal, VA asks:

Can you PLEASE have just one late southbound train to Fredericksburg, say 8 pm from Union Station? I currently either have to ride 150 miles round trip on 95 on my motorcycle every day, rain or shine (extremely dangerous), or stay in Baltimore, MD Mon.-Fri. so I can take the Marc Train, whose last train leaves WAS at 10:30 pm to Baltimore. It's sheer madness, all because VRE doesn't have a late train. Please help those who don't work 9-5! Thanks, Adam

VRE Management:

At this time, we have no plans to run later trains.

Dave from Woodbridge, Va asks:

It's getting closer to the fall. Have you all decided the times for the new train on the Fredricksburg Line yet?

VRE Management:

There are many moving pieces and are working on a new schedule.

Smokey from L'Enfant Plaza, D.C. asks:

I've notices people smoking while standing in the grass behind the platform at L'Enfant Plaza, by the stairs up from 7th Street. Is the grass a designated smoking area or is it just the North end of the platform?

VRE Management:

Smoking is permitted on the north end only.

Mike from Spotsylvania asks:

What is the status of the Spotsylvania Station ? can the web master add a progress page so you can post updates and pictures ?

VRE Management:

See previously asked question. We will keep the Capitals project page updated.

Sara from Woodbridge, VA asks:

There used to be an announcement played that said Please do not queue in the aisles, please stay on your behind until we reach your destination. Not only are you not playing that anymore, but more than ever, people start to queue up super early, and often even before all the passengers have debarked from the current stop. The conductors say absolutely nothing to people about queue issues! Please speak about what VRE can do to ease this problem! Thanks.

VRE Management:

Conductors continue to work on this issue.

Ken from Woodbridge, VA asks:

The Woodbridge parking garage stairway nearest the station sidewalks has concrete damage on one of the landings. This is a trip hazard and a therefore possible liability issue for VRE. Are you planning to repair this? I would also like to thank VRE for the great job maintaining the station.

VRE Management:

Our Facilities Manager has informed us that the concrete work will begin this weekend.

John from Rippon station asks:

Monthly ticket holders can do very little with those free ride passes you hand out. Is it possible to do something else for the monthly passengers, which BTW - are your best customers, because we buy monthly and ride the most frequently. Why reward or compensate the less frequent passengers and NOT do something appropriate for the monthly when Free Ride tickets are deemed necessary???

VRE Management:

Free Ride Certificates (FRC) can be used by monthly riders. Example: if you lose your monthly you will still need a valid ticket to ride the train so it's good to keep them in a separate place.

Rebecca from Fredericksburg, Virginia asks:

I depart and return to Leeland Road in South Stafford on trains 300/303 and like to ride in the quiet car. Since the addition of the cars recently train 303 seems to have difficulty finding the same stopping point, one only the quiet car will be off the platform the next two cars will be off platform. This causes us to move to another car thus slowing the trains departure. It would benefit both the passengers and the VRE if passengers could have confidence that the car they are riding in will stop in the same approximate location each day. Would a tennis ball and string help?

VRE Management:

We know that passengers enjoy the same spotting of the trains, but it is not always possible. Stopping a train involves multiple brake systems and is much more complicated than stopping a car.

Steve from Burke Centre asks:

Do you have an update on when the new cars will arrive and when they will be put in service? Has VRE received any additional funding due to the NoVa regional transportation taxes residents are paying? Is any research being done on potential ridership regarding adding a later train in addition to the current schedule?

VRE Management:

Four of the new cars are in service now with four more coming. No plans to add a later train.

Donna from Bristow VA asks:

Train 327 to Broad Run. Please have conductors enforce the nonuse of the emergency exit at the N - end of the platform in the evening. There are about 30 - 40 people daily that cut across the parking lot when they should utilize the sidewalk to the crosswalk to get to the back parking lots. It is an extreme safety hazard with people walking between moving cars.

VRE Management:

While this is one of our current concerns out there a more pressing concern are the passengers who hop over the railing at the south end of the station to try and get to their cars first. We continue to look for ways to address both of these issues

Big D from **Woodbridge** asks:

Same offenders... Everyday the same people cross Rt.1 leaving the Woodbridge Station to Occoquan Rd in the right lane which is illegal before 5pm. I have witnessed people from the 303 and Amtrak 95 train. Please have PW County address this before an accident occurs.

VRE Management:

Greg says, we continue to engage Prince William County on all issues concerning safety in their jurisdiction.

Ben Dover from **Fredericksburg** asks:

There is this couple that thinks they are "above" the queue-ers that line up correctly after the previous station de-boards. They get off of the train and re-board a few cars ahead to get better position, cutting everyone else who lined up. As they also stand in the vestibule because the people who lined up dont like to let them in the car.

VRE Management:

We will ask the Conductors to be more vigilant.

Marc from **Leeland** asks:

Is it possible to get all the sand shoveled out from the mid step landing on the south side stairs? It has been there since the spring storms.

VRE Management:

Our Facilities maintenance contractor will take care of this this week.

Sharon from **Woodbridge, VA** asks:

Not a question today: I just want you to know that Robert and Tony on Train 306 in the mornings bring sunshine to a cloudy day. They really are customer service oriented and are concerned about their passengers safety and well being on the train.

VRE Management:

Thank you. Gregg will pass this along to the other Managers at Keolis.

Richard from **Bristow, VA** asks:

Actually I have two questions, but one theme....while I am queuing to board the 324, there has recently been very loud boarding instructions and frankly the instructions are unnecessary and second, the volume is ear piercing high where I need to put my hands up to my ears! My second question is why have deboarding instructions for the first and second stops when people board but I see no one off-loading? Ultimately, the ride should be enjoyable without constant interference via too many redundant announcements. Thank you,

VRE Management:

Ultimately, the ride should be safe and that requires announcements. Sometimes, repetition is important because new passengers are boarding or alighting at every station. However, we will address the volume issue.

James from **Manassas** asks:

Just a request for people to park carefully in the Manassas garage. I've had to use the passenger door twice in the last month to get into my car because someone parked so close to the driver's side door.

VRE Management:

Courtesy Reminder to all Manassas garage users.

Eva from **Lorton, VA** asks:

When is the extension of the Lorton platform scheduled? I thought I read that it was scheduled for this summer.

VRE Management:

We have not issued a NOTICE TO PROCEED to the Contractor yet but that should be coming soon.

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

Is it possible to run AC at a bit higher temperature? It's really freezing cold in cars. Thanks.

VRE Management:

Temperatures are automatically regulated in the cars to stay within a certain range.

Dave from Manassas, VA asks:

In the interest of not reinventing the wheel each month, how about listing the "most commonly asked questions" on the Let's Talk page and update the answers as necessary? Every month we see: homeless guys on stairs, wifi on trains, extendign the lines, parking lot paving and stop-lights, bad drivers in the lots, when replacing bulbs, queuing in the aisles, etc.

VRE Management:

Great idea! We will see if we can incorporate something along these lines.

Dan from Haymarket VA asks:

What's the WIFI status? Anything riders can do to help accelerate its introduction?

VRE Management:

VRE has tested devices with the current cell technology on both lines. There are still significant areas that do not get a signal. We hope to be able to include Wi-Fi with other operational upgrades.

Losing my hearing from Manassas, VA asks:

I love riding the 330 train in the morning (Manassas to Crystal City), but I do NOT love hearing the horn blaring as the train approaches the platform. My prediction--there will be an unusual number of hearing loss cases in Manassas, and they will all be Manassas VRE passengers!!'m sure the reason for the horn is to warn traffic on the streets that cross the tracks on either side of the station, but these intersections have barriers that come down when the train arrives,so the horn is really not necessary.For the sake of our hearing, is there any way to cut out the long horn blasts at Manassas

VRE Management:

This is a mandatory rule on all railroads. Safety first. However, Manassas is a quiet zone which means no whistles between the hours of 10pm - 7am unless necessary.

Betty from Manassas asks:

The poison ivy is starting to creep across the handicap ramp again at LEnfant station.

VRE Management:

Our Facilities Maintenance Contractor will address the ivy this week.

Howard from fredericksburg, VA asks:

What is the status on the new station in Spotsylvania? Can anything be done about the cold temperatures in the morning trains?

VRE Management:

See previous asked questions about Spotsylvania station and train temperatures.

Why cancel the train? from Manassas asks:

July 28th the 325 train experienced one thing after another (i.e. switch problems, brush fire, reversal of train decision which caused more switch problems) was a disaster. I was one of the unfortunate 125 people affected. I was very disappointed with VRE that day. It's one thing to have issues that is out of your hands but it is also terrible to have poor communication to riders. There was not a single txt message sent out nor was VRE.gov updated. Even the later even riders did not receive anything that said it was resolved. All they saw was the red color on the tracker. The conductor kept saying that they have not received any information. Please just try to do a better job in the communication part.

VRE Management:

First we apologize for the issues you experienced. The first train talk went out when Train 325 was 10 minutes late. A second train talk went out 15 minutes later when the train began to move past the switch issue. A third train talk went out 5 minutes later when the train was held due to the brush fire. Once the decision was made to take the train back to Alexandria a train talk went out informing passengers. A follow up train talk went out at 6:10pm explaining the whole series of events. We have been assured by Keolis that the Conductors were making regular announcements on the train to keep the passengers informed. As always, we try to learn from every service disruption and will continue to work on providing good communications.

Betty from Manassas, VA asks:

Why is it so cold on the train everyday? It is extremely uncomfortable.

VRE Management:

See previously asked question.

Manassas from Manassas asks:

VRE has grown so much since I started to ride in 1996. I smile when I see the beautiful trains going down the track because I know we are all doing our part in keeping Virginia clean and beautiful. Thank you for the many years of great service and easy commute.

VRE Management:

As always, thank you for riding VRE!

Can't See Lines Too Park from Manassas Park asks:

So again I'll ask when will the horribly faded white parking space lines be re-painted at the Manassas Park Station? Most of the lines are 70% faded away making it especially hard to park in the dark for the first morning train at around 5AM.

VRE Management:

We have asked our Facilities Maintenance Contractor to provide a cost estimate to re-stripe the south end of the Manassas Park lot where the lines are faded as well as some of the lots in Fredericksburg. Once we receive that cost estimate we will move the project forward to get this done.

Angela from Warrenton, VA asks:

Why does the ticket vendor at Broad Run think it is OK to smoke cigarettes when his trailer is parked so closely to the entrance to the platform and subject his customers to second hand smoke while they purchase their tickets, beverages, etc...

VRE Management:

Don's Depot is a privately run business. We will be happy to discuss this with him.

Kim from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Any chance of getting a newspaper bin for recycling newspapers at the Fredericksburg station?

VRE Management:

We will pass this along to the City of Fredericksburg.

Dale from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Since no one wants to buy the old gallery cars that you put up for sale and would be too expensive to dismantle, have you thought about giving them to a museum? I hear the Baltimore Railroad Museum has old railcars on display. The Smithsonian museum in DC has a transportation section

VRE Management:

We have already sold six of the legacy cars.

Perminder Kaur from Lorton, VA asks:

I am a daily commuter from Lorton to Washington, DC. I use monthly pass to travel. This Monday, August 4, 2014, I forgot to buy my monthly pass and conductor issued me a Fare evasion summon. I had no intentions to violate law, it completely skipped from my mind that i have to buy my monthly pass. Is there any way to waive this fine and if not, is this prepayable? I really want answer to this, can you please reply back ASAP? P.S. I bought my august monthly pass in the afternoon on august 4th.

VRE Management:

Monthly tickets holders who forget their pass have an opportunity to get a waiver. This should be done within 3 days of getting a summons. Please see the back of your summons for instructions. If you do not qualify for a waiver fines may be pre-paid online.

Linda from Woodbridge, Virginia asks:

Have they scratched the dirt for the Spotsy VRE Station yet. I know they already paid up and did the paper work on the plans, but no sign of the construction plans. I tried to find the place myself, and could not see where exactly it will be built. Fill us in on this. Thanks.

VRE Management:

The station will be on Crossroads Parkway off of Route 17 just past the Beretta facility.

Arthur from Burke asks:

Four of five times in the past 3 months I have emerged from #332 at Union Station, ridden the escalator to the station on Tracks 25/26 only to have the escalator come to a sudden halt while filled with passengers. Due to the multiple times this has happend, Amtrak should be on notice of this safety hazzard and it's only a matter of time before people go tumbling. If Amtrak won't/can't fix this, VRE should not arrive on Tracks 25/26 or the escalator should be shut off permanantly.

VRE Management:

We have engaged Amtrak about this issue.

Frank from Fredericksburg asks:

Why are you not considering Saturday or Sunday service?

VRE Management:

There is currently not enough demand to justify weekend service.

Dave from Fredericksburg asks:

The monitors at the various stations seem to be underutilized considering the amount of information they could convey to passengers. Currently, they only show the train tracker and the train numbers. Why can't they also display the train departure times, etc. in fact, why doesn't the display have a CLOCK?! That would be really useful! Thanks, Dave FXBG

VRE Management:

We are currently looking into new VMS systems at the station which will allow us to better communicate more useful information.

Traveler from MP asks:

Last month you answered a question about concrete ties on the track. Are there any on the Manassas Line? That sounds very cool, but when I see construction on the rails, they have wooden ties. Is this something Norfolk Southern will use in the future? Just curious- the science of the railways is fascinating.

VRE Management:

Norfolk Southern does use concrete ties just not on the Manassas line. There isn't enough rail traffic to justify the added expense.

courtesy please from woodbridge, va asks:

A reminder about backpacks and heavy laptop bags to carry from the front. I got hit pretty bad with a laptop bag, no apologies. Also, can people please all bags on their lap or on the floor, scooting them closer to you still gives no room for the person next to you. Also - the conductor on train 311 last cars is AWESOME!!!!

VRE Management:

Courtesy Reminder and thanks for the compliment about the Conductor.

Matt from Lorton, VA asks:

In the cab car, why the conductor have to go inside and flip a switch after the train leaves a station?

VRE Management:

There are various cut outs located in the cabinets. Depending on the location, the Conductors could be cutting out doors for future stops or dampers on the HVAC systems.

Tim from Springfield, VA asks:

How do the exterior doors know when to open and why do they sometimes delay opening in the morning?

VRE Management:

Multiple doors are controlled by one Conductor at a single location.

John from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Have the new cars come in yet and are they in service? If so, what train are they on? They are not listed on your website

VRE Management:

Yes, the first four cars are in service on various trains. The car numbers are V820 - V823.

Bob from Alexandria, VA asks:

When is VRE going to start charging for bikes on the trains? It is ridiculous that bikes are allowed on trains for free when a human has to pay to take up at least one seat, not to mention 2 or 3 seats, like a bike takes up.

VRE Management:

VRE supports all green modes of transportation. However, we have limited full size bicycles to certain trains to minimize the effect on passenger seating capacity.

Rob L from Gainesville, VA asks:

I've seen a few mentions of a new Fredericksburg line by the end of the year. What about Manassas? We have just as much of a need for a new line as Fredericksburg. The 1:20 train is too early for most people and it's crazy that we have to wait until 3:50 for the next one.

VRE Management:

There are no plans to add service to the Manassas line. However, once the Gainesville/Haymarket station opens, we have plans to increase service.

VRE Management:

Thanks for the questions as our time is up. We always enjoy this interaction as well as in person events like last night at the Manassas Park National Night Out. It was great to talk to people about VRE and our commitment to safety. Hopefully you have seen us "Safety Blitzing" the various railroad crossings in our service area with informational items. We will continue our Safety Campaign at the Burke Centre WalMart on August 15th and 17th from 4pm - 7:30pm, and at the Ferry Farm WalMart in Fredericksburg on September 13, 2014 from 9am - 3pm.

It is easy to be distracted this summer with the warm weather, parties and vacations. However, make sure you take time to be aware of your surroundings and not take any unnecessary risks while commuting.

See Tracks? Think Trains!

Chris, et al.