

Virginia Railway Express

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, November 5th at 12 noon.



There are currently 64 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Thank you for joining me. I you all didn't stay up as late as I did! If you did, we'll get through this hour together. On to the questions!

Bob from Sposylvania Virginia asks:

Now that Obama has been elected President of America, will the VRE be on time, dependable, and comfortable?

VRE Management:

I don't think that was one of the platforms he ran on. BUT, we are working hard to keep your trains on time.

Tammy from Springfield, VA asks:

Please explain something to me. Twice recently the Manassas train I ride was paused during the trip to allow a late Fredericksburg train to pass. We had been on time, but as a result of the pause, were now late as well. What is the rationale of delaying the Manassas train when the Fredericksburg one is already late? Wouldn't it be better to get at least one of the two trains in on time?

VRE Management:

This is an issue I am continuing to work on with CSX and NS.

DEB from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

What is the status of the Fredericksburg Station? Lights out and today the smell of urine on the stairwell was worse than it's ever been. Keep up the good work folks!

VRE Management:

The light issue is the result of a circuit breaker problem that is currently being worked on by electricians. The City of Fredericksburg is working on it. However, they are finding it difficult to pinpoint because it is an intermittent problem. As for the odor, the City continues to grapple with this.

Doug from Burke, VA asks:

The new Metro smart card / Arlington Commuter Store method of obtaining transit benefits is much more difficult to use and much less useful than the old take-cards-down-the-street and turn them into tickets method. And the new system is just as vulnerable to fraud as the old -- I can lend someone my smart card! So, will VRE please develop their own system, one that is user friendly and convenient? Please?

VRE Management:

Since transit benefits are distributed across the Metro region, it would be counterproductive to alienate other agencies by creating our own SmartCard. Unfortunately that means we must wait for Metro to upgrade their system and relay their specifications to us before we can move forward on this.

Rose from Haymarket, VA asks:

Why will it take 10 years for the VRE to service Haymarket?

VRE Management:

For service to Haymarket to become a reality, there are many track and signal upgrades that have to be addressed. Transportation planning also has to address environmental concerns, right of way usage, impact on local roads, etc. While 5 to 7 years may seem like a long time, its better to utilize that time to get it right than to rush through a project only to have costly corrections down the line. In addition, we do not currently funding for construction.

mike beaty from Broad Run, MA asks:

How about getting us more machines to validate at Broad Run? The ridership increase should suggest the need for more machines; or at least a more motivated staff to keep them working. On 11/3 the machines were down and we were trying to get our monthly passes.

VRE Management:

I know that around the first of the month is a critical time to keep the machines up and running. While we are waiting for Metro to upgrade their system so we can upgrade ours, we have a limited number of extra machines to deploy in our system. Our Fare Collection Manager and the technicians constantly monitor the system to address any issues that may arise. In the meantime, I suggest purchasing your tickets a few days in advance.

Ralph from Burke, VA asks:

I have provided feedback about stations via the web several times. However, the Station Information Form insists that the "nature of the problem" must be on a short list of problems. My problem is never on the list so I have to pick something irrelevant or the form will not work. When will VRE fix its feedback forms?

VRE Management:

We are currently working to revamp our web site and will keep this in mind as a suggestion. Because of the way that these forms are routed by the web site, we have limited the options. As the forms indicate at the top, any other concerns should be sent to gotrains@vre.org.

Greg from Freddy asks:

When does the current contract with Amtrak expire? Will VRE be releasing an RFP to see if they can get a better deal on train operations?

VRE Management:

The contract will expire June 30, 2010. We will be issuing a competetive RFP in March 2009.

Stacey from Burke asks:

Will the VRE be doing its annual Santa train ride this year? Thanks!

VRE Management:

Yes, Stacy -- there will be Santa Trains this year! Keep an eye on our web site. Information will be available towards the middle of this month.

John from Bristow asks:

Not a question just a comment regarding the electrical problem on the Manassas 324 this morning. Thanks to the conductors who kept us informed of the situation there is nothing worse than sitting there especially in the dark wondering what is going on. It was very obvious that the entire train team was working very hard to get the problem corrected and thanks for that also. And special thanks to the new guy the conductor referred to as the "Dutch Boy" who tried to keep resetting the lights. In general VRE staff are great.

VRE Management:

I am glad to hear that you were kept well informed and will pass along your compliments to the crew.

John from Manassas, VA asks:

This morning I was helping a new rider for 324. I was a bit hard pressed to explain: why it didn't arrive on time (since there wasn't an announcement at the Manassas Park station)/(one announcement was made onboard re an issue with the power for lighting and doors during the trip)/why the emergency lighting didn't work in the fourth car from the N end/why the doors in our car did not open at all stations/why we stopped south of Alexandria while a Fredricksburg train passed us/then why we started up and passed the Fredricksburg train. I was embarrassed for you and the lack of communications.

VRE Management:

Now you know why I always say that there are two sides to every story. I'll continue to work with our crews to make sure that everyone has an experience more like "John from Bristow" who was on the same train.

James from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Are any steps being taken to secure the over-flow parking lot at Leeland Road Station as a permanent parking lot for commuters? As it exists today, the only reason Leeland does not have a parking problem is the over-flow lot. If the lot were taken away, those of us who use the lot would be in trouble.

VRE Management:

We are looking to expand Leeland Road parking. Currently an environmental assessment study is being conducted to best determine where the expansion should be. The area includes the overflow lot (that Stafford currently leases) and an area to the west of the existing parking lot.

Paul from Manassas asks:

The email messages about Manassas line train delays seem to be timely and regularly updated during the PM commute. However, I don't receive such notices about delays on the AM trains. There was a train 30 minutes late one morning this week with no alert on my Blackberry -- only found out after parking and walking to the platform. Any chance of getting timely email notices in the morning in order for us to make alternate plans if necessary? Thanks.

VRE Management:

Depending on how your account is set up you may be missing vital news. Please call and speak with one of our Customer Advocates about your account.

Standing from Springfield, VA asks:

There is no seating on Franconia-Springfield's northbound platform that is covered. All the seating is on the portion of the platform that is out in the elements. Could you arrange for sheltered seating? It makes it very difficult for those of us with disabilities who are unable to stand for long periods waiting for the train.

VRE Management:

I will ask our Facilities Manger to look into it.

Joe from Stafford, VA asks:

How much profit would VRE make if trains ran on Saturday and Sunday?

VRE Management:

None. Passenger rail does not make a profit.

Richard from Stafford, VA. asks:

Does Ken Brill still work for VRE/ He used to be a conductor on the Fredericksburg line.

VRE Management:

I believe you are referring to Ken Bliss. He no longer works in VRE service.

Ray from Broad Run asks:

Any chance you can help pass along to the conductor on 324 and 329 that the "You don't have to go to work/home, but you can't stay here" announcement isn't funny anymore.

VRE Management:

I'll relay to the conductors that jokes recycled again and again get stale.

Les Nessman from WKRP in Cincinnati asks:

Are there any plans to build new access points at the north end of the platforms at Lorton and Springfield for the people who go around the No Trespassing Signs every day?

VRE Management:

Hey Les! How's Jennifer Marlow?

We do not have plans to build new access points at these stations.

Craig from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Why are there so many times that it is standing room only on the train? Can't more cars be added? Or more train times?

VRE Management:

We can't add more cars because we are limited by our downtown storage space. Additional would require additional funding that we don't have.

Matt from Springfield, VA asks:

Dale-- I love VRE. I think you all do a great job. I know you try hard to keep fares down. I wonder if you have thought of expanding advertising revenue by selling space in cars and at stations for private advertisers. I've noticed metro has been doing a lot more advertising within their spaces.

VRE Management:

Thanks for the compliment & suggestions. We are working to expand the advertising on the new gallery cars. However, selling ad space in the current economy is not easy. I anticipate that we will be able to sell more ad space as the economy improves.

Joe from Stafford, VA asks:

Why does VRE not pro-rate the monthly ticket cost to cover VRE's lack of holiday operations? November has two scheduled holidays and yet a full month ticket cost the same price as a full month's operation. VRE is being paid when it is not providing the service.

VRE Management:

The price of a monthly ticket is based that each month has average of 21 service days. There are some months that have more than 21 and some with less. A monthly price change for a monthly ticket would be confusing for most to understand. With a number of 22 day months, it all evens out.

Charles from Woodbridge VA asks:

Is there any future plans of making the ticket vending machines compatible with using SmarTrip cards to pay for tickets?

VRE Management:

Yes, but we have to first wait for Metro to upgrade their system before we can make the necessary changes to our system.

Michael from Manassas, VA asks:

I am a permanent commuter and use VRE service almost every working day. I am completely dissatisfied with the service due to constantly delays of the trains, mostly after work at 5-7 PM., even many cancellations of the trains which is unacceptable. You want to increase the rates but a quality of your service does not even cost current rates.

VRE Management:

After a great start to our on-time performance during the first quarter of FY2009, the month of October dropped 3 percentage points compared to those first three months. I know it is important to keep up performance, especially with a fare increase scheduled, and I am impressed with how CSX minimized delays during the disruptions. Even with that, they are continuing to restructure personnel to ensure commuter operations are a priority during our service hours.

Rich from Manassas asks:

Congratulations on yet another month of providing the best commuting experience in the Washington metro area! Continuation of that award, however, is contingent on providing ample space for your riders. Do you have a plan to provide that space, perhaps something more definite than pushing the buck to the governmental units that provide financial support?

VRE Management:

Thank you for your compliments. We are working hard to provide more service given the challenges that we face. I know we must address the increased ridership and we are working with the state on a plan to provide more service.

Bill from Fredericksburg asks:

I have been riding only 2 years so, to some, I'm still a rookie. But one thing I have noticed is the disparity with which the conductors approach their jobs. Some are truly an asset to your organization while others convey an attitude that they would rather be someplace else. Do you have a program to recognize the good ones? Conductor of the quarter for instance. Both riders and management could vote. A plaque and recognition on email and in your bulletin would show "a job well done." Just a thought.

VRE Management:

This is a good suggestion. I will consider it for more review.

Bob from Woodbridge, VA asks:

It looks like construction is about to begin at the Woodbridge station. Please let us know what is planned and when will it be completed. Also, any possible disruptions this may cause to passengers.

VRE Management:

We are planning to construct a second platform with a pedestrian bridge connecting to the garage and a kiss and ride facility on the side adjacent to Route 1 at the Woodbridge station. While some rails have to be adjusted, we are hoping to contain any disruption to rail service to the weekend and outside our service hours.

James Cox from Spotsylvania, VA asks:

Why does VRE Commuter lot D have spaces allocated for residents of Manassas and Manassas Park? This is obviously a newly erected sign and it is clear someone is asleep at the wheel. Why in the city of Fredericksburg are there precious parking spaces allotted to a resident of a city over 40 miles away? The better question is WHY did VRE completely ignore Spotsylvania city/Spotsylvania county residents? Manassas residents should NOT be allotted ONE parking space in Fredericksburg!

VRE Management:

Lots C and D in Fredericksburg are open to any resident of a member jurisdiction, not just Manassas and Manassas Park residents. Adding a station in Spotsylvania has been in our plan since the beginning, although the county supervisors need to vote and approve Spotsylvania's entry into VRE.

David from Gainesville asks:

I usually have a beef or nitpick but I couldn't think of anything this morning so for a change I'll just say thanks for keeping lines of communications open with the passengers. Now if all organizations would be as communicative...

VRE Management:

Thanks for the positive comments. I know the best way to ease anxiety about delays and disruptions is to provide proper communications to the passengers. I will relay your comments to our staff.

Danielle from Dumfries, VA asks:

There is a problem when the train travels over the bridge connecting Lorton to Woodbridge, feels like the train will derail any day now. When is this going to get a serious review? I don't want it to be a 'we told you so' moment?

VRE Management:

The tracks and the bridges are inspected on a regular basis by CSX. I'll ask them to another look at this section.

Paul from Stafford, VA asks:

It appears to be unclear how commuters can purchase monthly passes once the MetroChecks are discontinued. The Smart Benefits brochure on the trains seems to only address residents of Arlington county which is a tiny minority of your ridership. How do I purchase monthly tickets once MetroChecks disappear??

VRE Management:

If your company is moving to SmartBenefit Vouchers, then you can use these to purchase VRE tickets like you did with Metrochecks. If your company is moving to completely electronic SmartBenefits, you can use those electronic benefits at an Arlington-based Commuter Store or online at CommuterDirect.com which will then mail VRE tickets to you.

Nathan from Ruther Glen, VA asks:

Though tied to the budget, how much more exploration is likely in extending the service line to Richmond?

VRE Management:

Our long term plan has VRE service extending to Richmond, however, there are a lot of obstacles, including how to handle VRE membership.

Matt from Springfield, VA asks:

If VRE went with a different operator that has lower rates, would VRE's operation costs be lower?

VRE Management:

Maybe. But, we will only know with a competitive solicitation.

Ken from Fairfax VA asks:

I heard many TVMs can't be fixed because the processors are at the end of their useful life. That's not a surprise to anyone watching electronics. What's the plan? Several have been out for over a month, and it looks like it is getting worse. Help! Buying more old machines doesn't help unless you cannibalize them for parts.

VRE Management:

Next year, we are going to upgrade the operating system our current fare collection equipment uses. In the meanwhile, our fare collection staff is replacing units as soon as we receive them from the manufacturer.

Al from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Why did you put the old cars back on Train #304? I don't like them and want to ride the news cars. Yesterday, VRE took off V717 and replaced with an old car. Why? Please put the new cars back on Train #304 and move the old cars to another train set.

VRE Management:

'Old' versus 'new' is always an interesting discussion! Some love 'em, some hate 'em. It doesn't matter which type of car you are talking about. We had to put 'em some where.

Robb from Manassas, VA asks:

When will all of the old cars be gone?

VRE Management:

Never. We will always have some older cars in stock because we can not buy enough new cars.

Jim from Gainesville asks:

If cost are running so high why has there been three conductors on the trains?

VRE Management:

Most trains have two conductors. The exception is the longer eight car train sets. The additional conductor on these two train sets is a cost we are willing to pay because we feel that it is in the interest of everyone's safety to have more crew on the longer trains.

Donna from Brooke asks:

I love the old cars on Train 304. They're much roomier and alot warmer than the new cars. Please leave them right where they are. Thank you.

VRE Management:

I knew I'd hear from someone with your perspective. Glad you like 'em!

Mildred from Woodbridge Va asks:

I have a monthly ticket and I am moving from Woodbridge to Manassas on November 22 will they honor the Fredericksburg monthly ticket on the Manassas line for that last week of November? and if not what are my options? Thanks Mildred Turner

VRE Management:

We base our fare structure on zones, not destinations, so you can use a ticket on either line, as long as the zones are correct. In your situation, since Manassas is Zone 6, which is further away from Woodbridge in Zone 5, I would suggest purchasing either Ten-Trip or Five-Day passes with the appropriate zones.

Matt from Burke, VA asks:

Has the severe drop in diesel fuel created an opportunity to eliminate fair increases?

VRE Management:

No because fuel prices are not the only reason that our operating costs are increasing. We also have to look at our revenue sources. As a result of the current economy, state and local funding is either staying flat or going down.

Steve from Spotsylvania, Virginia asks:

Will VRE still be running the S schedule the day after Christmas? If not, will step-up tickets for Amtrak trains be valid? I've already made plans to go to Washington that day.

VRE Management:

After looking at ridership history, and our budget, I have decided not to run service on Dec. 26, 2008. Our cross-honor agreement with Amtrak states that Step-Up tickets can be used on any weekday that VRE is not running service.

Lyle from Fred asks:

Any new word concerning a Spotsylvania Station?

VRE Management:

I haven't heard anything lately. I'll be sure to let everyone know when I do.

VRE Management:

Thanks for joining me today! I hope you all have a wonderful Thanksgiving. Keep our "S" schedule in mind for "Black Friday" shopping on November 28.

I'll talk to you on December 3.

Dale

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