

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, October 7th at 12:00pm.



There are currently 55 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Welcome everybody! By the looks of the trains there should be more of you tuning into this. We had our highest ridership ever yesterday. I know some of you are feeling the affects of that and will continue to monitor the ridership over the next several weeks.

Now on to the questions.

Steve Jones from Burke, Va asks:

The new platform extension looks almost finished. When is the projected date it will be completed? Will a roof also be built over the extension? Also, is ridership up? I've noticed the 322 & 329 much more crowded the past few weeks.

VRE Management:

The Burke extension is scheduled to be finished in December. As you can see the platform itself is already done with only the canopy left to be installed that will completely over the new addition. As for your other question, ridership usually increases in the fall, but this year's "bump" seems to be unusually high on the Manassas Line.

Dean from Nokesville, VA asks:

Are there any options for VRE to expand parking at Broad Run? If not what are the reasons? Now that summer is over and everybody is back to work, it's almost a daily occurrence that passengers have to park as far away as Piper Lane. Then there's the walk along/in the access road to the station. It's a miracle nobody has been hit.

VRE Management:

The surrounding area is either owned by the airport or unsuitable to build on. There are plans to build a parking garage, but will take a few years to complete if approved. In the meantime, I can only suggest to park at Manassas which has plenty of surface parking not used.

Mimi from Manassas, VA asks:

Is there a chance of moving the smoking areas AWAY from the platforms? I realize there is a smoking "section" but there's no way around getting smoke blown in your direction and cigarette butts thrown on the ground (not using the ash cans).

VRE Management:

I know smoking bothers a lot of non-smokers out there but we do not have any plans to amend the smoking policy.

Mimi from **Manassas, VA** asks:

How do you impress upon the riders that a stop sign in a VRE parking lot is still a stop sign? I get on the train in Manassas, Manassas Park and sometimes Burke Centre and the riders go the wrong way up a one way street, will blow through the stop signs just so he/she can be one of the first to get out and not get caught in a 5 minute delay. It's dangerous!

VRE Management:

We send many communications via Train Talk, conductor and platform announcements, as well as reminders in the VRE Update. We also work with local jurisdictions to enforce traffic safety.

Jesse from **Manassas** asks:

Why were there two locomotives pulling the older cars on Manassas train 326 this morning?

VRE Management:

This is the same train set that had mechanical difficulties last night. To ensure that would be no problems with service this morning, an additional locomotive was put on it.

Jack from **Leeland** asks:

Want to commend the EMS responsiveness of the TR309 crew earlier this week. The crew of TR302 had an EMS emergency a month ago. In both instances the crew reacted well in securing EMS ambulances at the next available station. They do more than just check tickets. Thanks.

VRE Management:

Ultimately, your safety is the first priority of our train crews and I am glad to hear that they responded so well.

ayyagari from **manassas,va** asks:

Govt. of Virginia introduced Lynchburg-Washington DC train is not useful for VRE commuters because of high stepup fee. Will it be possible to negotiate with Govt. so that VRE monthly commuters can board the train without stepup fee. Thanks for answering my question

VRE Management:

As part of the agreement to allow VRE riders on this train, step-up tickets were required. Once we know how many VRE riders are taking advantage of this service I may approach the state to assist in funding.

Eric from Manassas Park asks:

I love riding the quiet car since most passengers are seemingly oblivious to his/her surrounding and must incessantly talk on the cell phone but I can't get a seat on the way home. Any plans to make more than 1 Quiet Car? If not two, how about 1 1/2?

VRE Management:

While the Quiet Car is popular, we don't have any plans for expanding the program.

John from Quantico, VA asks:

Will an Express train be added to the Fredericksburg Line

VRE Management:

I have programmed an express train in the FY2011 budget, which starts July 2010. If it makes it through the budget process without being cut, we will institute it in July.

Al from Springfield, VA asks:

How long until the construction in Springfield is complete? I am tired of going slowly in the area every day

VRE Management:

The shifting of the tracks will continue for a few more weeks. After that, construction of the third track will start. I do not anticipate any slow orders once that starts.

Davin from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Will the new platform at Woodbridge have a canopy? It should to protect people standing in the rain. Other stations have it.

VRE Management:

Yes, there will be a canopy and the station will be completed in December.

Judy from Rolling stop asks:

What is wrong with the Manassass line - it's way overcrowded the past few days? Standing is not what I am paying more to do.

VRE Management:

Nothing's wrong, everybody loves it! That is why they are all flocking to the trains.

Marie from Manassas Park, VA asks:

More often lately, when politely reminding a talking fellow rider they're in the Quiet Car, the person talking knows where they are & becomes defensive and quite aggressive in their response. How should riders handle this? Should the rights of every other rider in the car be superseded by the selfish and inconsiderate behavior of one or two? No consequences seemingly reinforces the behavior. What recourse is there? When everyone is finally too intimidated to point out the signs, will that be the end to the Quiet Cars??

VRE Management:

I do not expect the riders to enforce the rules of the Quiet Car. If you have an issue with another rider not observing the rules, please see a conductor and explain the situation.

Dave from Gainesville VA asks:

Penny wise, pound foolish. Train overcrowding has become commonplace. Why not buy a few more cars. Increased ridership means lots of revenue for VRE.

VRE Management:

The bad news is can take up to two years to get new railcars. The good news is we thought ahead and 10 more are on the way.

Frank from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Why is it that VRE can run FREE trains on "Clifton Day" but cannot run fare collecting trains on Independence Day?

VRE Management:

Clifton Day is sponsored by the Betterment Assoc. and all costs are paid for by them. Norfolk Southern donates the track time. Unfortunately, with the increased security in D.C. over the years, we did not have enough riders to recover even a portion of the costs.

from **Bristow, VA** asks:

Parking capacity **MUST** be resolved at Broad Run. This needs to be your priority. You cannot effectively operate a mass transit system without providing sufficient access for patrons to park--

and park safely. The situation is more than inconvenient; it's dangerous. At this point, it is pure negligence on VRE's part. Neither the access lane nor Piper Lane is designed to have cars parked on it w/ people walking. Both lanes are massively congested w/ moving vehicles. It is a matter of time before someone is hit by a car and badly injured. If this happens to me, I will certainly be suing VRE.

VRE Management:

I am very aware of the problem. We have expanded parking 3 times since 2001. Now there is no more land available for additional parking. Prince William is providing over \$1 million dollars to do an environmental study and design to do a parking deck. As part of that effort we are looking for opportunities to maximize parking capacity. We are hoping to add parking in the interim.

Jack from Manassas, VA asks:

Why are outlying area vendors, i.e. Manassas and Fredricksburg area not able to sell discounted tickets beginning October 17th?

VRE Management:

We are doing this to reduce the fraud we have been seeing with discount ticket sales. The inner city vendors such as the Connector Store and the Commuter Store are much more transit-focused and can deal with these issues much better.

Mike from Spotsy, VA asks:

Three things: First, thanks for going back to 30 minutes on the FRCs. Temporarily going to 60 was a good move for financial reasons and reverting is a good move promoting accountability. You're paying attention. Second, I ride three different a.m. and three different p.m. trains, and your conductors are doing a great job on all 6. Uniformly courteous and helpful. Finally, I ride so many trains to try to avoid the "prison trains" i.e. the old consists on trains 308 and 309. When are these relics going back to Siberia?

VRE Management:

First, you're welcome. Second, I have been working with Amtrak to maintain a consistency across all trains and I am glad to see it is happening. And third, we do have 10 additional new cars on the way but we will need to keep a few of the older cars in service to maintain seating capacity.

Dan Peacock from Manassas, VA asks:

Hurry for Amtrak! The new Amtrak service is great, which functions as a semi-express mid-morning train and semi-express afternoon rush hour train for VRE riders and as a direct train to Boston/Springfield,MA and Lynchburg without stopping in NY. I have see VRE riders,

including myself, already using it. Question: Why not let riders have the wonderful convenience of boarding on the weekend at Burke Centre?

VRE Management:

I am working the issue.

Mack from Fredericksburg asks:

I recall earlier this year you announced that the Frederickeburg station was to get a make-over; repairs, cleaning, glass replacement. When is that to start?

VRE Management:

The RFP will go out soon and work will start in spring 2010.

John from Manassas, VA asks:

Given the current overcrowding on some of the trains esp. 324, 329 - SRO. Is there any thought to providing an incentive (beyond getting a seat/having to stand) to spread the ridership to less popular times? Or adjusting the makeup/consist of the trains?

VRE Management:

We continually monitor the ridership on each train. I can say I have noticed substantial growth across the whole Manassas Line, approaching the numbers the Fredericksburg Line already experiences. At this time, we do not have any short term relief.

Tom from Fredericksburg asks:

Most of the free parking spaces are located south west of the station. A staircase is needed on the south west side of Princess Ann Street. The congestion going down the stairs is almost too much.

VRE Management:

I just reviewed the plans and I will move it to construction as fast as possible.

Jesse from Burke, VA asks:

Why was the decision made to replace the 329's equipment with the 331's equipment? Since the Manassas line 331 is one of the busiest, the shortage of 2 cars made for dangerous overcrowding. People had to stand in the vestibules because of no room in the main cars. The conductors couldn't walk thru the train because of the amount of people. The decision seems flawed- since the equipment obviously worked, why the need for the swap? Why couldn't the 329 run a few more inutes behind and maybe pick up some of the 331 passengers who may have been at the stations already?

VRE Management:

The switch yesterday between 329 and 331's equipment was only a temporary one. There was a problem with 329's original equipment. Rather than incur a longer delay while fixing it, we switched consists to minimize delay at the expense of overcrowding. It has been our experience most riders would rather stand than be delayed significantly. You should see the normal equipment back on both train sets today.

Nathan from Ladysmith, VA asks:

When will we likely see the older cars phased out?

VRE Management:

We are scheduled to receive 10 more Gallery cars in the beginning of next year which will replace 2 of the 3 older sets we currently run. 1 older set will remain and cycle through both lines. We will also keep some of the better old equipment for backup purposes when cars have to be sent in for maintenance.

Thomas from Fredericksburg asks:

How do you handle smokers who light up just as soon as they exit the train and puff their way off the station? I am very sensitive to cigarette smoke, and there have been several times that I have gagged all the way down the exit ramp at Fredericksburg!

VRE Management:

Because the station is outdoors, we cannot ban smoking. The VRE policy is that the designated smoking area is the northernmost 100 feet of the platform. However, this is mostly a courtesy issue and cannot enforce it.

Gary from Culpeper, VA asks:

I noted your new policy for disabled riders. The earliest I can get to see my VA doctor at the VA hospital in Richmond is 13 November. What is the date that disabled veterans have to have the VRE disabled card in order to avoid a citation? I have a short supply of 10 trip cards on hand and have to throw them away because I can't see my physician in time. Thanks.

VRE Management:

Our intent is not to further frustrate our riders with disabilities. Please call our office and ask to speak with Anna and she will be happy to work with you.

Craig from Culpeper, VA asks:

I just recently moved to Culpeper and drive to Broad Run Station to catch the VRE to Crystal

City. My neighbors had mentioned that they thought there was an initiative to have a VRE station at the Culpeper train station. Is this still in the works and if so, when would that happen?

VRE Management:

There are no plans to build a VRE station in Culpeper. The only expansion we have moving forward at this time is the to Gainesville-Haymarket area.

DEB from Spotsy asks:

How do we get a shuttle buss from Lorton Station to the DLA bldg and Fort Belvoir? Fairfax connector never gets to us on time and we end up missing our train and have to wait an additional 30-45 minutes for the next train. I love riding the VRE, but having to wait any additional time makes for an extremely longer day than what's necessary.

VRE Management:

I can't provide the shuttle service through VRE but will be happy to talk to some people over at DLA and Ft. Belvior in an interest to help out their employees in this matter.

Ms M from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Are there changes coming regarding elimination of service stops between Fredericksburg and DC?

VRE Management:

There are no plans to eliminate any stops on the Fredericksburg Line.

DEB from Spotsy asks:

I want to thank the person that finally turned the street lights on in the G or H parking lot in Fredericksburg, VA. It's nice and bright and SAFE now. Thank you!

VRE Management:

I will pass along your thanks.

fred from Burke, VA asks:

Why does it take so long for VRE to answer email from customers via their "GoTrains" system? I inquired on Sep 29 as to why Manassas line train 329 has been so crowded of late. As of today, Oct 7 (6th business day since my email to GoTrains), I have still not received an answer.

VRE Management:

We try to keep our answers within 3-5 days. If it is taking longer, I will look into it and see what I can do to speed up the process.

Burke Rider from Burke VA asks:

What is planned by VRE to improve notification of delayed trains? Too many times I get a text of a delayed train that is already old. Example: At US, I get a text that says 331 is 10 mins late but I get that at 15 mins past departure time with no train in site. Why should I stay on the text list if the information is already old and worthless?

VRE Management:

Unfortunately, instant technology is not as instant as we would like. Wehn trains are delayed, it takes time to find out the reason and send you the information. We are continually looking for ways to streamline the process.

Tobias from Fredericksburg asks:

I took your survey on the train this morning. How come these aren't done online as opposed to paper? I think you should provide both methods.

VRE Management:

Thank you for filling out the survey. This is the Master Agreement survey which determines how much subsidy each jurisdiction pays based on where the riders live. For that reason, it must be conducted by those physically riding the train.

Happy Rider from Broad Run asks:

Just a general comment and then a suggestion. Overall I think VRE is great- good option to the trials and tribulations found on the roads around here. However, I do believe that if you pay an average of 14 dollars per day to ride you should be entitled to a seat. I also think that creating more parking at BR would result in a more even distribution of ridership as those wanting to take later trains would because they wouldn't worry about a parking spot. Also, gotta say the bike policy should be put on hold until you have enough capacity for people. Just general comments. Thanks.

VRE Management:

I understand your frustration. While my preference would be to guarantee a seat for everyone, I cannot do this anymore than Metro or any bus system can. As for the bike policy, it is currently a pilot program and if we see problems, we will make adjustments.

Scott from Albuquerque and Cucamonga asks:

If there aren't any plans to create a north entrance to the Lorton platform, could you at least get CSX to remove the railroad ties with spikes sticking out of them that are next to the path as well as the No Trespassing sign which is blatantly ignored every day?

VRE Management:

CSX uses various areas along the tracks to store materials to expedite repairs quicker, and that is one of them. The No Trespassing sign is there for your safety and should not be ignored.

Thomas from Freds, Va asks:

As ridership increases in Fredericksburg, are there plans in the future for adding additional parking? It is tiresome and very frustrating to drive around looking for parking.

VRE Management:

There is no more space in Fredericksburg for additional parking. Currently, Spotsylvania is scheduled to join VRE on Feb 15, 2010. If they join they have agreed to build a 1,000 space parking lot and station in Spotsylvania County. That should relieve the parking situation but that will take at least two years.

Kerri from Manassas Park, VA asks:

Can anything be done about people who run up to the station at the last minute and jump on the train as it is pulling out of the station? I've seen this happen at least twice in the past few weeks at Alexandria. The people run up and jump onto the last car of the train where the conductor is standing with the doors open.

VRE Management:

If the engineer has been given the signal to proceed, then no one else should be allowed to board and the conductor should prevent that from happening. The conductor should be allowing one leaf of the door to close while the conductor is standing in the open part as the train departs.

Ken from Fairfax asks:

VRE's been talking about growth since I started riding ten years ago. One item was to find a mid-day storage area for the trains since Union Station has been a limiting factor. Without something giving, the day isn't far off that the trains will be full leaving Manassas Park. What are the plans and schedules to get additional mid-day storage space? What's approved and funded?

VRE Management:

This has been one of my toughest battles but I consistently try to get Amtrak to allow me to build more storage tracks at Union Station. I have not been successful. However I have constructed a

storage track at L'Enfant that will hold two six car trains. We are currently finishing up electrical wayside power and compressed air. So we could move two trains to L'Enfant which would give us room to lengthen other trains. Unfortunately it will not occur until July 2010 and those two trains stored at L'Enfant will not go into Union Station, thus some unhappy VRE riders. That is a long response to a complicated situation.

James M from Bristow, VA asks:

as you're aware that Broad run passengers started queue by the exit doors as soon as the train STOPS at Manassas stop. Could you make it mandatory that all passengers remain seated when the train is in movement? This is getting very hard for Manassas passenger the get out from the train. Passengers do start queuing up by the stairs from Manassas stop all the way to Broad Run Station.

VRE Management:

We have a "Standing Means Detraining" policy and will make sure the conductors are enforcing it.

Bill from Fairfax, Va asks:

Any thoughts about a better solution for a rider honestly forgetting to validate their ticket? Not many people are willing to risk a \$150.00-\$500.00 fine to avoid a ~\$7.00 ticket, not to mention the lost time at work to appear in court?

VRE Management:

You would be surprised how many repeat offenders we have. Some have three or four citations. However, I am working the General Assembly to change the law again so that there is one infraction for the serious offenses and a separate one for the lesser offenses.

fma from quantico va asks:

part 1, did Amtrak loose the contract to operate the trains i.e. conductors and engineers..part 2, did you ever find out why Bono gave a shout out for VRE at his concert?

VRE Management:

We are currently in the process of determining who will be awarded the Operating and Maintenance contract.

I can only guess that Bono is a train enthusiast and couldn't hold back his excitement about VRE.

Calvin from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

I am handicapped and I saw the notice yesterday that VRE is going to get its own handicap card from the Washington METRO. I have that as well the the Virginia Disabled Drivers License plates and Card in my wallet. What confuses me is. Exactly where I can go to get my NEW VRE ID? If I understand it correctly I can get the photo taken at the kiosk out front in the Springfield Franconia metro before the stairs? The one that sells Metro and VRE tickets? If so what dates and times?

VRE Management:

Please call Anna at our office and she will be happy to help you get everything squared away.

Yogi from Manassas Park, VA asks:

When will you increase the frequency of the trains, it is good if we have a trin between 1.15pm and 3.45pm,

VRE Management:

Currently our contract with CSX specifies specific time windows when we can operate. Their freight traffic slows down during our service hours and utilize all the time outside of our operating window to run their trains as quickly as possible and minimize lost revenue.

Mary from Manassas asks:

Where do I find the schedule for the new Lynchburg to Washington service (that caused train 331 to leave later)? I checked Amtrak's website and it's not there.

VRE Management:

Amtrak has a special website for the new service, <http://www.amtrakvirginia.com/>

Tom from Burke asks:

Are there any plans to get WIFI on the trains?

VRE Management:

Unlike Verizon, we are afraid of the dead zones. And until the ones in Clifton and Stafford County get resolved, there will not wi-fi service. My ground rule there must be continuous, dependable service between both endpoints.

Eric from Fairfax Station asks:

Everyone on my train missed a conductor announcement this morning because -- thirty seconds after the train pulled out of the station -- the automated announcement of "Caution, the door is closing" took precedence. That safety message should. It seems to invite people to try to board, and I know that's not YOUR intent. Can you explain why the conductors keep the door open after pulling out?

VRE Management:

Every train must have one conductor watching the platform as the train departs. As a result, they must keep the door partially open causing the door closing announcement to play longer than usual.

Richard from **Stafford, VA.** asks:

What happened to "Rick" who used to work the Fredericksburg Line?

VRE Management:

Since our conductors are contracted from Amtrak, they have the ability to bid for different jobs in VRE and Amtrak, based on their seniority, which is what Rick did. We can say that he was working on Amtrak 86 this morning.

VRE Management:

Our time is up. The next On-Line Forum will be Tuesday, November 3rd. In the meanwhile, I hope you have a Happy Halloween and hope you get lots of candy.
