

Virginia Railway Express

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, February 4th at 12 noon.



There are currently 73 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Welcome! Thank you for joining me on this cold and sunny winter day. Thank you for all of the comments about our Inauguration Day service. We are glad that we could participate. If anyone is interested in commemorative tickets, check out our web site. Now, on to the questions!

Renee from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Is there adequate ventilation on the trains? I have a concern w/ all the constant sneezing and coughing among the riders. How is the air circulated? Will the conductors ever ask someone to leave the quiet car if they have a constant and chronic cough?

VRE Management:

Yes, the blowers on the train are constantly introducing fresh air into the system. This prevents the air from becoming stagnated. Unfortunately, it's cold and flu season and one has to defend themselves appropriately. For those that are under the weather, please cover your mouths properly and keep your hands clean.

Jim from Burke, VA asks:

During the last snow event, why did the crew clearing the walkways park their trucks so as to block the handicapped visitor's spaces? If there ever was a day when the people with handicaps needed to park close to the station, that was the day, and they could not. I found one space not blocked and used it, but anyone coming after me would have been out of luck.

VRE Management:

With different stations and lots falling under different ownership, different entities are responsible for snow removal. Please email us with more information at gotrains@vre.org. The specific station helps us determine which party to address the concern with.

Bob from Woodbridge asks:

Not meaning to sound like a scrooge, but does anyone verify that some of the folks parked in the handicapped slots, are really entitled to park there? I have elderly and ailing friends and parents, and don't begrudge anyone who needs the extra room or shorter walk, but some of them running from the train to their cars seem to be in pretty good shape. Probably a county police issue, right?

VRE Management:

Yes, the enforcement of handicapped parking falls under the jurisdiction of the county or city in which the station is located. Please remember that disabilities come in many forms. Not all are visible. For those that do violate handicapped parking rules, please know that is a disservice to those that really need them.

Joan from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

I must tell you that I enjoyed riding the train to Washington. However, I had to quit riding because the first train in the morning seemed to be very often late getting into Union Station. My work day begins at 7 am and although I have a short walk to my place of business I was consistently late and was disciplined for tardiness. Changing my work hours to 7:30 only got me home later, especially when there are problems on the evening train. Will there ever be an earlier train leaving Fredericksburg??

VRE Management:

I am continuing to look at how I can provide an earlier train.

Matt from Burke, VA asks:

Hello, Has there been any consideration to extending the overhead cover to the length of the platform at the Burke Centre Station. I was surprised that was not included in the garage budget. Thanks!

VRE Management:

Yes. The platform will be extended 200 feet south of the current platform with a canopy. Construction is expected to begin soon and complete late this fall.

Chris from Manassas, VA asks:

If the \$850 million proposed for Amtrak in the Stimulus bill manages to stay in there, what would this mean for VRE?

VRE Management:

Nothing. This is Amtrak money.

However, we have submitted a stimulus package of our own to cover the cost of 15 locomotives.

Pat from Bristow, VA asks:

Are there any future plans for Broad Run parking expansion? I know two additional lots were recently added. However patrons are now parking on Piper Lane and making driving unsafe.

VRE Management:

There are no short-term plans to extend parking @ Broad Run. However, I am working with Prince William County to start the process of building a multi-level parking garage. As you can imagine, arranging funding is extremely difficult at present.

Jeff from Woodbridge, VA asks:

Are there more new gallery cars in the pipeline?

VRE Management:

We will receive in February/March 2010.

LG from Manassas Park, VA asks:

I just want to let you know that I really appreciate the customer service you provide. The ticket machine at Manassas Park "ate" a new 10-trip pass of mine while I was validating it and the conductor of the train that morning and EB Easter helped me get my situation resolved conveniently and easily. THANKS!

VRE Management:

I am glad to hear of your good experience! I will be sure to pass on your thanks to E.B.

Davin from Woodbridge, VA asks:

What happened to the VRE update newsletter and why can't VRE afford to publish it bi-weekly when the advertisers cover the cost?

VRE Management:

Unfortunately, the number of companies interested in advertising in our publication has dropped significantly (a sign of the times). As a result, we can only afford to print the VRE Update once a month.

Phil from VA asks:

Yesterday while waiting for the train, I saw a notice on the overhead screen on the platform about using "Rail Time" on your website. This is a very handy tool and I use it quite often, especially on my Blackberry. One of the previous forums, it was suggested that the display of this information be rearranged so that you don't have to scroll to the bottom of the screen to see the train information. You indicated that you would look into seeing what could be done. Do you have any feedback for us?

VRE Management:

When looking at initial costs, I discovered that we must issue requests for proposals to create a "mobile" friendly version of our web site. I will be asking our board later this month for authorization to solicit proposals.

Betty from Stafford, VA asks:

As of March 2009 will we have to start using the Smart Trip Cards to purchase our VRE monthly passes?

VRE Management:

It all depends on how your agency chooses to distribute transportation benefits. If they made the decision to use solely electronic benefits, then technically you would transfer your electronic benefits to a SmartBenefits account to use at the Commuter Store or on-line with CommuterDirect.com to purchase VRE tickets. If your agency is distributing the new paper SmartBenefits Vouchers, VRE and its vendor network already accept these like Metrocheks. We will still continue to accept Metrocheks until March 20, 2009.

Eric from Manassas, VA asks:

How often do you (and other VRE management) ride the VRE to work?

VRE Management:

I, along with about half of our staff, regularly ride the trains to work. Like most other commuters, there are circumstances where I have to occasionally drive, but for the most part I am a regular rider.

Sleeping in from Gainesville asks:

Why do the conductors wake-up the people on the second level of the cars to check our tickets? We make sure they are showing so why don't the conductors come up and check them? Please don't give the excuse it's hard for them you bought these cars and ounce age we, the customer suffer.

VRE Management:

The conductors are required to check tickets. Unfortunately, some people have to be woken up to ensure proper validity. You may wish to approach the conductor to see if there is a way they can do their ticket check so you may sleep during your commute.

derrick from fredericksburg asks:

Can you purchase monthly ticket in advance.

VRE Management:

A monthly ticket is available for purchase on the 10th day of the preceding month through the 9th day of the current month. For example, March tickets will go on sale on February 10th.

Bill from Brooke asks:

On Tuesday the Fredericksburg train stopped extra long at Quantico to allow folks to use the restroom. The conductor said this was necessary because one of the restrooms was closed because of concerns about sabotage! Please tell us this is not a new policy.

VRE Management:

Many restrooms have been vandalized and we are working to deter such behavior. I will not close out any bathrooms in the future.

Jimmy from Rippon asks:

Dale, how are you handling the news that President Obama was capping CEO pay? Are you going to have to sell your rental properties and luxury vehicles?

VRE Management:

If you consider a 2001 VW Passat a luxury vehicle, then I am guilty.

Alexander from Rippon, VA asks:

Dale, please post this. There is a guy who leaves the Rippon station from train 303. He drives a VW Passat. Here is a message to him: You need to A) use your turn signal, B) not use turn lanes on Dale Blvd to pass other drivers, and C) not tailgate so badly that you are almost touching other driver's bumpers. This behavior is illegal.

VRE Management:

I am not guilty here, since I ride from Burke Centre. Seriously, everyone should practice safe and courteous driving -- especially when leaving or entering station parking lots.

Sam from Manassas asks:

What are the chances we will see a reduction in fare costs or a suspension of the proposed fare hike in the next budget cycle?

VRE Management:

I don't think we can avoid it. With cuts in state funding this year and the next and with the trouble local jurisdictions are having in funding VRE, we will have to ask riders to pay more.

Clator from Woodbridge VA asks:

On the older cars, there is an infernal dialing signal I always hear coming over the loudspeaker. What is it, and can it be turned off?

VRE Management:

Let me look into this. I know that there is one car that has was having this problem. Please email gotrains@vre.org with number of your train and the rail car if possible.

Tom from Spotsy asks:

With the last snow storm, the VRE Feeder (FRED) did not run. I was not happy with waiting for an hour in the snow for a bus that never arrived. I have now learned that there is only two ways to find out if the FRED Feeder service is not running. Listen to 93.9 or visit the FRED web site. I feel that is not enough. Can you help out? put that information out whit your email service?

VRE Management:

FRED has contacted us to see how we can pass this information on to our passengers. We will let you know when we have some specifics.

Lorene from stafford, va asks:

I was 2 hours late to work last week because of a brake problem on Train 306. There was no mention of free passes at all. Why did we not receive free passes that day?

VRE Management:

While crews should hand out FRCs at the time of the delay, it is not always possible since they may be working to resolve the problem. Please fill out an FRC Request form (on our web site at <http://www.vre.org/programs/freeride.htm>) and we will send you what you are due.

Cowboy from Burke, VA asks:

What officials at Fairfax County needs to be contacted about the lack of lights, markings, notices, etc at Rolling Road VRE? The pedestrians, of which I am one usually, take our lives in our hands walking across Burke Rd to Burke Station Square. The area, as remarked in previous months, is unlighted, unmarked and downright dangerous. During the winter time, it is especially hard. Something needs to be done before a passenger (or a child!) is seriously hurt or killed.

VRE Management:

You may want to talk with your elected official or contact Fairfax County's DOT.

John A from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Why are there two machines at the Crystal City VRE Stop still inop? As you enter into the Crystal City Station there are three machines for purchase/validation, then there's two about midway down the platform that doesn't work. These two have not worked for six months to a year. Can you remove or repair?

VRE Management:

We are working to restore them to full service. Unfortunately, there are several issues (fluctuation in power supply to that part of the platform, touch screen problems, etc.) that continue to plague those machines. Hopefully, we can resolve all the problems soon.

Bart from Manassas, VA asks:

Prior to Inauguration, the Quiet car on Manassas train #326 was one of the newer Gallery cars. When we came back from the holiday, it had been exchanged for one of the old junkers. First question, why the change during Inauguration? Secondly, since there is only one Quiet car per train, why not make it somewhat operable? The current car has to have a conductor to open the outer doors, the vestibule doors to the north end are impossible to open, the PA system does not work and on Monday there was no heat. What gives?

VRE Management:

The quiet car on that train had to be taken out of service. The logistics of switching cars makes it difficult to put the old car somewhere other than the designated spot for the quiet car. I will let the mechanical team know about the PA and heat problems on the car.

Dan Peacock from Manassas, VA asks:

I heard that VRE's Special Inauguration Service went well, that the "planned for" additional trains assured that no one was stranded, and that VRE was able to assist some elderly folks who were stranded at L'Enfant, needing desperately to get to Alexandria. Well Done VRE! Did VRE get a number "Thank You's" from out-of-town riders? Such folks are likely to use VRE for future trips to DC and to save money on lodging.

VRE Management:

Thanks for the compliment! I estimate that over 80% of our passengers that day were from out of town -- not regular riders. Both CSX and Norfolk Southern allowed us to turn an extra train that evening to make sure that everyone got to their destinations.

Erman from Fredericksburg, VA (Leeland Station) asks:

Is it possible to fix the VRE ticket machine at the 7-11 at Deacon/Leeland Rd so it will accept credit cards again. (svcs Leeland Station) Other option is to allow TVMs to sell discounted student tickets. Your help is appreciated. thx Erman

VRE Management:

I am aware of the problem. We are having difficulty getting a compatible card reader from the manufacturer. I will get our fare collection manager to see what we can do to about resolving the issue.

Mike from Manassas asks:

It is going on again and now it is getting bad. Queing on the Manassas line train 327. People are standing up as soon as the train arrives in Manassas. Although the train is at the station long enough for Manassas riders de-train, one really has to fight through the Broad-run riders to get off. Also it is the same five or six guys. It is out of hand can you please do something about it.

VRE Management:

Queuing has always been a tough courtesy issue. I will talk with Amtrak to see what we can do to get the crew to be more proactive in alleviating the problem.

Sally from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

Why do people think they can leave rude notes on our cars? I had one left on my car, questioning my handicap placard. Let everyone know that it is no ones business. Also, no notes of anykind should be placed on our cars. Example: Cleaning crew for hire. Thank You

VRE Management:

We do not allow placement of bills or advertisements at our stations or lots. If this happens to you, email the name of the company to gotrains@vre.org and will we address this with the company. As for personal notes, we highly discourage this behavior but unfortunately cannot prevent it.

Bob from Alexandria, VA asks:

Why does VRE staff continuously seem inept or incompetent? Every time there is a delay, VRE seems to always fail at communicating the issue to its riders. Last week, train 306 broke down and 308 picked up riders at Woodbridge and the following stations. At no point were riders made aware that the train was overcrowded and couldn't be boarded. It was about 5 degrees outside and we could of made other accommodations. It's not that difficult to make an announcement over the PA system letting riders know the status. Or is it?

VRE Management:

I agree that communication during delays is vital. While we put out Train Talk messages and platform announcements that the Train 308 will be crowded, the crew on Train 306 was on the phone with mechanics working to get the train moving again. I will continue to stress with the crews that announcements keep the passengers at ease, but please know during mechanical delays, that the conductors are working to get the problem resolved.

Bob from Manassas asks:

When are you going to start using the new engines? Keep hearing about them but havn't seen them!

VRE Management:

We have ordered five new engines, but will take approximately two years to get them. We have to wait for our turn in the production line as other agencies placed orders for locomotives first. They are not like cars that you can buy off the lot, they are made to our specifications and require lead time before they will be in service.

MJBucci from Falmouth asks:

Can VRE install a "sick" car at the end of the train set for example. Riders that exhibit uncontrolled coughing, sneezing and the splattering of fluids would be asked to board that car. Is this an option ?

VRE Management:

That's a new one. While it would be difficult to implement, I will again take this time to remind everyone to take the necessary steps to prevent the spread of diseases.

Mark from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

First, thanks for the only reliable transportation in and out of the inauguration. Nice job. Here's my comment: I'm sure the most efficient way to expand capacity is by using longer trains. However long trains leads to horrific traffic jams at parking lots, longer train rides, and other inconveniences. I know you have to get approval from CSX but please consider expnding capacity by adding another train to each line and forgo paying to lengthen platforms.

VRE Management:

Thank you for the compliment. Concerning train lengths, currently, we have maxed out the lengths of our trains. There is no more room in the mid-day storage yard to add more cars.

Joe from Stafford VA asks:

What is VRE's plans to complete the additional 3rd rail to DC? The ability to have the required infrastructure in place to allow for more trains would seem better than trying to acquire more locomotives/cars.

VRE Management:

Construction will begin later this year on nearly seven miles of a third track from Alexandria to Franconia/Springfield. Also, design work is underway for 11 miles of a third track from south of Rippon to north of Brooke -- taking advantage of the extra space on the new Quantico bridge.

Stephen from Fredericksburg asks:

First month in the area and on VRE. What a clean and efficient service. You won't hear me complain about 10 minute delays. The other day, 95 was a parking lot. Thank you for the work that you do.

VRE Management:

We are glad we can provide Northern Virginia with an alternative way to work and we know our system simply existing is not enough. We continue to work to improve our system to make it a more reliable and enjoyable commute.

Donna from Manassas Park, VA asks:

Why does VRE have such cold air blowing strongly through the cars, especially on the upper level? This is really causing havoc with my sinuses and chronic bronchitis. Also, it is very uncomfortable on those very cold days. I only have coughing fits when I ride the train. Is there a reason for the cold air blowing?

VRE Management:

These blowers are introducing fresh air into the train. You may wish to sit on the lower level to avoid the blowing air.

Bart from Fredericksburg asks:

Did the three leased locomotives ever make it into service?

VRE Management:

Yes, and they have provided extra relief and flexibility to our locomotive power.

John from Manassas, VA asks:

Can you list the questions that are not answered at the end of the forum

VRE Management:

Unfortunately, there is not a way to list the questions publicly.

Confused from Stafford asks:

Regarding your schedules do the times indicated reflect a particular train's arrival or departure from a station?

VRE Management:

The times on the schedule are the departure times.

randy from manassas asks:

I know that you have had comments in the past about the announcements being very loud. Now I can barely hear the announcements on the trains. The automated messages are loud and clear, however the announcements

made by the VRE personnel are barely able to be heard. I usually take trains 326 and 331.

VRE Management:

The conductors have the ability to control the volume of their personal announcements. I'll let the appropriate crews know.

Valeri from Fredericksburg, VA asks:

CSX claims they can move a ton of freight more than 423 miles on a single gallon of fuel. If this is the case why do ticket prices keep increasing? What makes the VRE different.

VRE Management:

Save that question for next month's forum when CSX representatives will be joining me.

VRE Management:

There were lots of good questions today. While I'd like to keep going, I am out of time!

Thank you for joining me and see you next month.

Dale

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