

# Virginia Railway Express

## Let's Talk!

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



There are currently 82 questions waiting to be answered.

### **VRE Management:**

Thank you for joining me on this rainy Thursday afternoon.

I hope that everyone had a chance to complete a survey either yesterday or today. We appreciate you taking the time to give us your feedback.

Now, on to the questions!

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### **Marianne from Burke, VA asks:**

Last month a rider asked about the interior doors closing on people, and you used it as an opportunity to comment on queueing. People must also walk between cars when boarding the train at the stops where all the cars do not make the platform. The doors also close on people as they are exiting the train. Isn't there anything that can be done about this?

### **VRE Management:**

The conductors close the doors after they see the crowd has deboarded. If you don't deboard along with everyone else, the crew assumes everybody that wanted to get off has, and close the doors. If you deboard at a station where you know the car you are in is not going to platform, please start your detraining process earlier.

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### **dkk from Broad Run asks:**

I understand that there may be a fare increase this summer, which I think is fair, given the ever-increasing costs of fuel, manpower, and equipment. Any increase in fares is more than offset in the saving of pain and agony that would be spent in traveling by car on 66/95/beltway, etc. However, PULEEEEEZ can you make any increase in fares end EVEN DOLLARS? The current fares that end in cents (i.e., current \$220.90) are not user friendly for metro check, and are a real nuisance. Thanks!

### **VRE Management:**

Fare increases must be increased the same percentages across the whole table. Unfortunately, there would be no way for all of our fares to be in exact dollar amounts.

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### **derrick from fredericksburg asks:**

we will VRE get tough on people hogging up the seats. i see this all the time one person in a two seat and wont move over to let other people have a seat.

### **VRE Management:**

If you ever need help getting a seat, the conductor is the appropriate person to help you get one. They are the authority on the train and are there to enforce the seating policy.

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### **Harry from Leeland VA asks:**

At this point do you know if there will be any special 4th of July service offered for the fireworks?

### **VRE Management:**

We have not offered special 4th of July service in several years. Due to budget constraints, I will not be running trains on July 4 this year.

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**Jim from Lorton** asks:

What's the deal with the 'S' schedule this year? Do you still plan to run it this Christmas period? Bearing in mind the increased ridership, and the fact that not everyone will be able to save 4 days vacation for the time between Christmas and New Year is it possible that you will consider running a normal service for some of those days. Last year I remember Train 307 in particular was very crowded, I know that extra cars were added to try to accomodate the extra riders but that wasn't really ideal was it?

**VRE Management:**

Yes our current plans are to run the "S" schedule this year the week between Christmas and New Year's. We repeatedly see decreased ridership during this period and we started reduced service last year as a cost saving measure during the holidays. We will take the ridership data from last year and this year's increased ridership to adjust the train consists accordingly during the holidays at the end of this year.

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**Robert from F'Burg, va** asks:

Why is Leeland Sta. overflow lot being closed on May 8.

**VRE Management:**

The overflow lot at Leeland Road will be closed tomorrow only for construction of a paved pathway between that lot and the main parking lot.

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**Dan from Springfield, VA** asks:

MARC recently bought 26 new locomotives, which they say are more fuel efficient than the old ones. Why does MARC have funding to purchase new locomotives and VRE does not?

**VRE Management:**

We have ordered nine locomotives from MotivePower. They are scheduled to be delivered in the Fall of 2010. Our contract with them also has options for 11 more engines.

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**Gene from Fredericksburg** asks:

If I have a Zone 1-9 Monthly ticket on the F'Burg line and need to ride the Manassas Line once in a blue moon, will my ticket be valid?

**VRE Management:**

Yes!

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**Kevin from spotsylvania** asks:

Is VRE planning on charging spotsylvania people to park at there parking lots?

**VRE Management:**

No.

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**Joe from Bristow, VA** asks:

Why was the May Operations Board meeting canceled?

**VRE Management:**

We had no action items to bring before the Operations Board. So, with the Board's approval, we opted to cancel the meeting.

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**Darlene from Nokesville, VA** asks:

In the April forum a rider mentioned the subsidy for federal govt employees increasing to \$230.00 per month. While this may be true for some feds, not all agencies have jumped the subsidy all the way. Our subsidy only increased \$10.00 per month, from \$110.00 to \$120.00. Wanted to make that point, in case nobody else has mentioned it yet. I ride Zone 6, so pay full fare, and while the subsidy helps a lot, it's still only half, and I still have to get on metro \$3.30 per day to get from Union Station to my office and back again. So try not to raise VRE too much, okay? Thanks!

**VRE Management:**

We only mention the increase in transportation benefits as an informative item for our riders. While this is good for public transportation in general as more people will have incentive to use transit instead of driving, transit benefits are not taken into consideration when we increase fares.

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**Harry from Broad Run asks:**

The conductors could stand to be a lot less heavy-handed about "asking" for tickets to be displayed. Don't tell me it's because passengers are supposed to display and don't, these conductors are nasty-sounding even before they come down the aisle to check.

**VRE Management:**

I have asked for a "zero tolerance" policy and checking tickets is their job. It certainly would be easier for everyone if your tickets were displayed.

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**Jimmy from Manassas, VA asks:**

What is company policy on checking tickets? For those of us that do buy tickets everyday, it seems that several people are still able to slip through the cracks. I sat behind a gal the other day that had a ten-trip that hadn't been validated since March! Plus, tickets are usually checked once the train fills up around Burke, and then not again. One conductor did re-check between Crystal City and L'Enfant, as people like to only pay for Zone 2, but go to Zone 1. For those of us that do pay, I would like to see the conductors do a better job of making sure EVERYONE pays! Thanks.

**VRE Management:**

This is exactly why I have asked that conductors be more aggressive in checking tickets.

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**Steve from Burke, Va asks:**

I usually take train #322 each morning and I have noticed significantly more people both on the train when it arrives at Burke Center Station and people on the platform. Have you seen a significant increase in riders since the February? Has the increase in passengers impacting the need for a fare increase in July? Finally, are the new locomotives still on schedule for arrival in 2010. Thank you....

**VRE Management:**

There has been a nominal increase of riders for #322, but that train is still only a little more than half full. The overall trend is that ridership is still rising in comparison to this time last year, but it is leveling off. Unfortunately, there is not enough of an increase in ridership to eliminate the need for the fare increase. As for the new engines, they are still on schedule to arrive in fall of next year.

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**j from rippon asks:**

What is going on at the woodbridge station?? Quite the construction project. Also, is this part of the stimulus package, or something completely different?

**VRE Management:**

We are constructing a second platform and pedestrian walkway at the Woodbridge station. Funding for this did not come from stimulus dollars, that money is going to purchase new locomotives.

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**DEB from Fredericksburg asks:**

Good Morning! When will the repairs to the Fredericksburg station start? We have stairs falling apart. Under the platform is falling apart. VRE Sign out on the corner is falling apart. No windows to keep the wind and rain out.

Come on...I've been asking this same question for 4 years now. We would like an answer. Thank you!

**VRE Management:**

We are working on the final design for improvements. I anticipate that we will have a contractor lined up by Fall and the work should take about six months to complete.

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**JB from NoWhere, AZ asks:**

If you have a full train, does it cover the cost of running that train? Could the VRE run with money help from the government? If you had to run this service without any taxpayer dollars how much would a one fare cost from zone 1 to 6? Guesses are ok ...

**VRE Management:**

No, it doesn't. Fares cover roughly 55% of operating costs. In order to run without any taxpayer dollars, ticket prices would have to almost double. That does not include capital costs. You would still need federal and state assistance for purchasing engines, new cars, extending platforms, etc.

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**Todd from Broad Run asks:**

Lately, we've had an unfortunate run of breakdowns. While the FRCs might be nice for some folks, they're really worthless for the Monthly Ticket holders. Is there anything we can do to use these to perhaps offset our costs?

**VRE Management:**

While we have been over 90% on time for three out of four months this year, FRCs for monthly ticket holders has always raised this question. Many monthly ticket holders tell me that FRCs do come in handy when they forget their pass, take vacation, or have family in town. So, hang on to them.

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**Stander from Crystal City asks:**

What are your plans to finally address the overcrowding situation on Manassas Line Train 329 which continues to get worse and worse? On many days, there are already a considerable number of people standing when the train leaves Crystal City, and the line of standers often extends all the way down the aisle when the train leaves Alexandria. Does VRE think it fulfills its obligations to riders by merely providing "standing room only" and not a seat to passengers?

**VRE Management:**

I would like to accommodate every rider with a seat but we do not have the capability to add another car to that set. Additionally, our tariff states we cannot guarantee a seat, similar to riding Metro. Currently #331 has more riders so the bigger consist is designated for that train and we cannot switch the train sets because it would create the same situation on #331.

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**Dan from Manassas, VA asks:**

I don't understand why those with baggage who aren't able/willing to use the overhead racks are instructed to place their belongings under their own seat (for example in the "Courtesy section of the Rider's Guide publication). Especially now that the Sounder cars are gone, wouldn't it make more sense, and be more courteous, to place their belongings under the seat in front of them rather than under their own seat (like the airlines)? That way, their bags would crowd in on their own foot room, not that of the person sitting behind them.

**VRE Management:**

While it is standard on airlines to place belongings under the seat in front of them, we encourage riders to use luggage racks in the overhead space, near the doors, and under their own seat. Additionally, we are not equipped to handle large luggage like airline cabins are designed.

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**RJ from Spotsylvania asks:**

Is there anything that can be done with the marquee signs? It is IMPOSSIBLE to see them from the window seats on the lower level (who designed these things?). Considering how poorly the audio works on the new POJ cars (either too quiet or not at all) the marquee sign is sometimes the only method available to know the next stop... that is unless the conductors start doing their job and make station announcements. I almost missed my stop this

morning.

**VRE Management:**

The marquee signs were designed from the beginning of our service when we operated different equipment. There are also ticker tape signs on the new cars to see what the next stop is. While I haven't noticed the announcements aren't loud enough, I will ask the conductors to turn up the volume for the automatic announcements.

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**Bob Sledd from Quantico asks:**

Can you confirm whether VRE will be enforcing the 2 seat rule for larger customers like several airlines are now doing? If that is the case it will have a major financial impact on those of us who ride daily and we need to plan or change to car/van pools.

**VRE Management:**

I have not ever had any plans to charge more for "riders of size."

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**Bill from Springfield VA asks:**

I really miss the late morning train. It gave me the opportunity to arrange for doctor and school appointments, etc. before coming to work. I am now forced to drive in on those days and pay \$20 for parking. Any plans to bring back the late morning train?

**VRE Management:**

I do not have any plans to bring back a VRE train in this time slot. However, I have been working with the state and their new Lynchburg service will pass through our service area at this time. The train will make station stops at Manassas, Burke Centre, Alexandria, L'Enfant and Union Station. VRE riders will be able to use this train with a multiple-ride VRE ticket along with a Step-up ticket.

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**Alan from Richmond asks:**

What is the present limit of number of cars on a train due to platform lengths? If train lengths were to be lengthened has consideration been given to having a locomotive at each end of a train to increase reliability when a locomotive fails?

**VRE Management:**

The answer truly depends on which platform, as they have different lengths. One of my goals is to increase the size of our platforms to accommodate eight cars.

The locomotives we have ordered have been specifically designed to power and pull/push ten cars.

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**Dan from Manassas, VA asks:**

Any thoughts on eliminating the Backlick Rd station. It would save 95%+ of the Manassas Line riders 6 minutes of there life everyday.

**VRE Management:**

There are no plans to eliminate the Backlick Road station. Although it is one of the underutilized stations, there are enough riders to justify its existence.

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**Alex from Manassas, VA asks:**

You should make Broad Run, Zone 7 to help eliminate the parking problem at the station.

**VRE Management:**

I don't think making it more expensive to ride from Broad Run would improve the parking situation at that station. I am continuing talks with Prince William County to build a garage there but funding is an issue, and it will take some time.

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**Bea Ann from Fredricksburg** asks:

Mr. Boardman has informed AMTRAK employees (Ink) that he is going to start talks with CSX about electrifying the WASH - RIC mainline. How do you think that this might effect VRE? ( electric motors, higher speed etc?)

**VRE Management:**

I, too, have heard talk of this project. However, a project of this magnitude will take many years to fund and complete.

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**PMA from Spotsylvania, VA** asks:

Is there anything that can be done about the traffic when leaving Lot G in Fredericksburg? That's two parking lots, G and H (377 spaces), plus overflow parking all pouring onto Frederick St. If we could turn right on Prince Edward St. legally, I'm sure it would be a big help. Can VRE bring this up with the City of Fredericksburg?

**VRE Management:**

When lots G and H first opened up, many VRE riders would speed down Prince Edward St. The local community created such an uproar that the City prohibited VRE riders from turning right out of the lots onto Prince Edward. I doubt that this will ever change.

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**Doug from Burke** asks:

Two questions: (1) Do you expect an influx of new riders because of the increase in federal transit subsidy, and if so where will you put the new riders (in my seat, perhaps)? and (2) What's the status on the Burke Center platform extension? Thanks!

**VRE Management:**

We hope the increase in the subsidy will attract new riders and increase in ridership highlights the importance of public transit. This can be used as evidence to increase funding for more service.

The project manager overseeing the Burke platform extension says construction is scheduled to begin in early June.

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**Dave from L'Enfant** asks:

I forgot my monthly ticket for the first time in 8 years on VRE. I know you say you "only require one thing from our passengers." But why does VRE have zero tolerance for the passengers, but "appreciate our patience" when the engines die and we're 2 hours late getting home? I had a receipt and I apologized. Since my badge and my ticket are in the same pouch - it wasn't like I MEANT to forget the ticket.

**VRE Management:**

I truly understand your position. Unfortunately, too many people have tried to cheat the system. It is difficult for our conductors to know who has legitimately forgotten their ticket and who is trying to scam. I have decided to leave that to the judge.

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**Dave from Lorton, VA** asks:

What do conductors do during the middle of the day?

**VRE Management:**

So the conductors are in compliance with FRA regulations about required rest for train crews, they are off duty in the middle of the day. They are provided a crew rest room where they can sleep or they can take care of personal business during this time.

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**Jay from Fredericksburg, VA** asks:

We were told one morning that the 545am train was going for a "car wash" so we they were using the old cars. It's been weeks since this happened and it appears we are stuck with the old cars yet we pay the same price as everyone using the new cars. Any word on when we will get the new cars back? Word on the train is that it's your way of getting stimulus money, by showing the old cars.

**VRE Management:**

It looks like #302 will have that set for a while. We hope to have the new Gallery cars we ordered to replace the Kawasaki cars we sold by this time next year.

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**Will from Fredericksburg** asks:

Yesterday I rated you very high on the survey. But I have one concern. While the station announcements are loud and clear, the conductor announcements aren't necessarily, especially in the quiet cars. When delays occur and the conductor makes an announcement, they should walk through the cars to make sure everyone has heard it. This is not only a courtesy issue but safety as well. You're doing a good job.

**VRE Management:**

Thanks for compliment. In regards to conductor announcements, I will relay your comments to the conductors.

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**Gil from Warrenton, VA** asks:

In the fall last year, it was announced that there would be fare increases in January and July 2009. In order to place my Monthly Computer deduction via payroll, I need to know what the new monthly fare will be starting in July in order to ensure sufficient funds are withheld from my paycheck. This information is needed by May 18th. Thank you.

**VRE Management:**

The new fare table will be out next week.

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**Marc from stafford** asks:

Your new Consist/Average Ridership chart shows that the consist for Trains #326/#329 has 786 seats but those trains average 817 and 843 passengers respectively. On the other hand, the consist for Trains #302/#305 can carry 873 passengers, but they are only averaging 673 and 691 passengers. Would it not be prudent for VRE to swap the #302/#305 consist and the #326/#329 consists given their respective passenger loads?

**VRE Management:**

You bring up a good point. I will look into switching it.

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**Ed from Manassas, Va** asks:

Can something be done about the early queueing people on train #327 to Manassas? The problem arises at Manassas Park in the last car of the train. A large group of 8-10 riders wait just long enough for the passengers to get off the train and then rush to the doors. The conductors I know have seen this and yet have done nothing to stop the problem.

**VRE Management:**

If they are waiting to queue after the train leaves Manassas Park, then they are doing it properly. We do not want passengers to queue if they are not getting off at the next stop, in your example, if they were to queue up after Manassas Park for Broad Run.

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**Ed from Manassas, Va** asks:

Can people that get onto the trains with only one or two stops before their destination take a seat when available instead of sitting in the stair wells? These folks are holding up the passengers getting off at the next stations.

**VRE Management:**

I will ask our communications staff to send out courtesy announcements to take a seat if available instead of sitting in the stairwells.

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**Mad Max from Centreville, Va** asks:

I like the demolition derby exit to the Manassas Parking Garage. But for those of you that don't want to crash their cars into eachother, can we stop trying to race everyone out of that? People are running to get to the parking garage and even running over people and almost pushing them out of the way just to try to get out of th parking

Garage first. Or here is another tip, wait 5 minutes and the traffic is cleared up and you can go through like you own the place.

**VRE Management:**

A safety tip from a fellow rider.

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**VRE Management:**

Well, my time is up! Thanks again for joining me.

Next week we start Meet the Management during morning service. I will be at Fredericksburg with all you early risers. I look forward to seeing you!

Our next on-line forum is Wednesday June 3.

Dale

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