

Let's Talk!

The next VRE online forum will start on Wednesday, September 2nd at 12:00pm.



There are currently 22 questions waiting to be answered.

VRE Management:

Good afternoon. I can't believe summer is almost over and it's already Septemeber, but I am enjoying the weather and hope you are, too. On to the questions!

Eric from Sterling asks:

Have you ever approached VA about reinstalling tracks and operating on the W&OD trail? It seems crazy that with all the traffic around here that that couldn't be used for more than just one more walking trail.

VRE Management:

This would be a good addition to our system, but with the recent emphasis on high speed rail connecting major urban centers of America, securing capital funds for a project like that would be a daunting task. I think the only rail service you can hope for that way is Metro's extension to Dulles.

Bart from Fredericksburg asks:

You seem to be getting the maintenance issues back in line. What's your secret and can you keep it up? Good job so far.

VRE Management:

Thank you, I'm glad you noticed and will be sure to pass that along to the team. We have implemented new and more specific maintenance procedures and checks on our trains. Every evening in our yards all problems are immediately corrected. We try to diagnose as many problems during the train's downtime so it won't affect passenger service and will continue to do so.

Jim from Quantico asks:

With those small white signs that have "VRE" with an arrow- along roads in the region that direct you to stations, could you put a small sign beneath those on the same sign

post with the specific station name being directed to. I would think this would really help new residents like me or people coming to pick up family members. Thank you

VRE Management:

That is something I can look into.

DW from Ohio asks:

Do you see VRE hiring locomotive engineers in the near future?

VRE Management:

We contract our train and engine crews to Amtrak.

Steve from Burke, VA asks:

I was wondering why the Manassas line trains seem to speed up before they go over the bridge by Lake Accotink in Springfield but then immediately slow down by 5-10 mph after crossing the bridge? I was just curious as the train speeds along the Manassas line seem to be inconsistent along the route.

VRE Management:

The Manassas Line has more bends and curves than the Fredericksburg Line which prevents the trains from achieving top speed for very long. As for the specific slowdown after Lake Accotink, I cannot say why. Send in an email to gotrains@vre.org and in the meantime I'll see if I can get you a more specific answer.

Doug from Burke asks:

Over the years you've waged a continuing battle against those who queue in the aisles. Instead of making frequent and ineffective announcements, why don't you follow the successful model you use to protect your revenue stream: criminalize it. Queueing is no worse than forgetfulness. One is criminalized; do likewise with the other.

VRE Management:

We have a "Standing Means Detraining" policy for queuing. While it is not exactly criminalizing it, it is a way of forcing people to comply. Unless everyone is seated, the train will not depart the station, countering the action of wanting to get off the train first to get home earlier. I will continue to stress the importance of this to the crews.

Debbie from Broad Run, VA asks:

I am one of the many riders of your trains that is put to sleep by the motion of the train.

It's a great little nap, but not when it makes you miss your stop to get off the train. Has VRE ever considered some kind of promo item such as something we passengers could clip on ourselves or new ticket holders to say "Wake me at"? It would be most appreciated.

VRE Management:

While we have heard of some riders doing this, we have never thought to make some signs for our riders. I will ask our Marketing Manager to look into this.

Mike from Spotsy asks:

Two questions: 1) Assume Spotsy agrees to join: When does VRE lift the "member jurisdictions only" ban on parking lots to which that applies, and 2) In a previous forum, you implied that we could be cited if your TVMs overprint a validation and it can't be read. Say it ain't so! The TVMs have gotten better, but this has been a common problem in Union Station, Leeland and Fredericksburg. Thanks!

VRE Management:

When Spotsylvania becomes a full member of VRE, their riders will be permitted to park in the member only lots. About the overprinting validations, I do not recall saying that but if you are mistakenly issued a summons because the conductor read the validation incorrectly, it may be rescinded.

Brian from Manassas, Virginia asks:

PLEASE PLEASE speed up that VRE train-finder map!! It is WAY too slow. When you are racing to a VRE station -- you really DO NOT WANT to wait 2 minutes of "Requesting time" for the application to download into your handheld, and THEN wait thru the "Loading" process of this VRE map ... and then wait through the LONG "Loading Images" cycle. After ALL this - the darn thing comes up totally white and you have to wait thru ANOTHER cycle of these delays to (hopefully) get the map on screen!! Please fix this and speed it UP!! It's infuriating. Brian

VRE Management:

We are currently working on a procurement for contract with a company to provide a mobile version of our website. Once completed, hopefully this will speed up the process for you.

MJBucci from Falmouth asks:

Hey, just saying thanks to you guys and the Stafford County Sheriffs office for keeping up with the Leeland Station parking situation... some of the spaces were re-lined / re-

marked, and the many violaters of the parking laws associated with this lot have been ticketed accordingly on a regular basis.

VRE Management:

I am happy to hear it and will pass your compliments along.

Paul from Manassas, Virginia asks:

For train 330 (departs Broad Run @7:20am) The engineer has a heavy hand on the horn in the morning. I do not know his name. This was not the case when there was a lady running this train, before. She used it when it was necessary. He uses it constantly. I don't know what your regulations are, but there is a large difference in these engineers when it comes to this issue. I believe in "all things in moderation". Could you please see what you can do to have him ease up a little? People along the route have complained about the excess at their homes in the morning.

VRE Management:

I know that the regular engineer has been out so you should expect her back soon. In the meanwhile, I'll look into seeing if we can temper the noise with the substitute engineer.

Sheila from Caroline County, VA asks:

The topic of SPOTSY joining VRE is very hot. Why is there still a question about whether that will happen or not? Was Spotsy given a way out of the agreement that the BOS approved a week or two ago? What would prevent this from happening? I ride VRE from Fredericksburg to Alexandria. I love having VRE as an option.

VRE Management:

Spotsylvania has voted to join VRE. Now the 8 jurisdictions and 2 commissions that own VRE must approve them joining. We must accomplish this by Nov. 30. I'll let you know by November if this occurs. If this doesn't happen, Spotsylvania cannot join. We'll let you know how things look in November.

David from Manassas Park, VA asks:

Why is the ticket office being moved in Alexandria? It's really convenient to purchase tickets right at the station.

VRE Management:

While it is not as convenient location as the Amtrak station, the Old Town Transit Shop does sell all types of fare media for all transit in the region. They will be better to assist

riders who use more than just the Alexandria station. Plus it is ultimately a cost-saving measure.

Ralph from Burke asks:

Dale -- In the 9/12/07 On Line Forum you stated: I know a lot of people don't believe us when we talk about leaf oil. If you have access to the archives of the Wall Street Journal, they wrote an interesting piece on the delays that occurred throughout the East Coast as a result of leaf oil. I don't understand why I have to go back to 2007 to find anyone ELSE with this kind of problem. What are they doing differently now? Is VRE doing anything different this year? Or should we start a betting pool on leaf oil incidents? I bet we'll have two significant incidents.

VRE Management:

There is not a lot we can do about leaf oil on the rail except lay more sand, which we will do.

Mike from Manassas Park asks:

Are there any plans to expand parking at Manassas Park? Now that school is starting, the lot is full again. We are not allowed to park at the dental building, and the only other option is to park far down the street on the side of the road.

VRE Management:

Unfortunately, there are no plans at this time to expand parking at Manassas Park due to the unavailability of land in the immediate area. The only recourse I can suggest is to park at Manassas, where there is plenty of surface parking or Burke Centre where there are 1,000 spaces in the garage.

Carl from Stafford County asks:

Recently, the VRE re-articulated how it instructs conductors to issue citations if a ticket is found to be out of zone and they will let a judge decide guilt. Although I sympathize with the plight, I think there ought to be a more common sense approach....for example I have a court date set to adjudicate my ticket being out of zone (I accidentally used my 8-2 instead of my 8-1 and did not realize it until the conduc)...so for a 57 cent deficiency we will consume hundreds of dollars and hours of people's time to adjudicate something that could have been done on the spot or at the next stop.

VRE Management:

Carl, I am sorry. You did not have a valid ticket and you were cited. I have instructed the crews that if they see an invalid ticket they must write a summons. It is not a perfect system but it's the best way for making sure everyone pays their "fare" share

john from **manassas** asks:

What is up with the announcement about always displaying tickets. Many of the new seats have no clip and many of the clips on the old seats are broken. I don't like wearing necklaces.

VRE Management:

With many people getting on at many different stations stops it can often be difficult to tell whose ticket you have checked whose you haven't. I would suggest emailing us for a complimentary ticket clip that you can clip you ticket to your shirt pocket.

Frank from **Arlington, VA** asks:

There is a desperate safety and aesthetic need for a set of stairs to be installed at the Fredericksburg Station at the point where riders exiting the north-east end of the platform stairs must negotiate a grassy slope to reach awaiting FRED and Martz buses parked on the street.

VRE Management:

I am working to have stairs constructed in that area.

Concerned from **VA** asks:

No more time for VRE!!! The new VRE schedule signage in Union Station is nice, but what happened to the clock. Current Amtrak & Marc schedule signage include the time.

VRE Management:

Union Station is the property of Amtrak and they are responsible for all of the signage. I will see what they can do about the clock.

David from **Woodbridge, VA** asks:

Why does VRE number it's equipment using 3 digits instead of 4 like other rail agencies do? Also, why are the cabs painted in orange/black stripes?

VRE Management:

We don't have as much equipment as some larger rail commuter agencies which is why they have train ID's with four digits. Cabs are painted orange and black so they are easily seen when operating cab forward, however, I don't know why they are orange and black as opposed to other colors.

Debbie from **Broad Run, VA** asks:

Does VRE have any plans in the near or distant future to start accepting payment for tickets through the Smart Card System instead of the vouchers?

VRE Management:

There are plans for us to accept SmarTrip to directly purchase VRE tickets, however; we must wait for the regional fare system to be upgraded, which has been a long process. You can use electronic transit benefits (SmartBenefits) to purchase our tickets from the Commuter Store or online at CommuterDirect.com.

Zana from **King George, VA** asks:

With the Fall H1N1 Flu predictions, is VRE going to have VRE Conductors regularly announce preventive measures to riders (hand over mouth when coughing or sneezing in shirt sleeve; use hand sanitizer; stay home if sick, etc)? There are some really rude folks on the VRE train who have total disregard of other passengers!

VRE Management:

When flu season hits this fall, we will do our best to remind riders to be courteous when sneezing and coughing on the train. While not everyone will heed our requests, that is unfortunately the nature of public transportation. Zana, to answer your other question, we will continue to wipe down exposed surfaces on our trains every night.

Bob from **Woodbridge** asks:

Not a question or complaint, I've been riding since Day 1 and am generally pretty happy with the service. But, if you ever consider discontinuing those idiotic, distracting, patronizing and rather insulting "Life on the Train" announcements, I would vote Aye. Thanks.

VRE Management:

I am sorry to hear you don't like them, but at least they got your attention. We had to do something to combat the courtesy issues we see every day on the trains and the run of the mill announcements weren't cutting it. While you would beg to differ, I have heard from many riders that love those messages and would like to expand beyond the current messages we have now.

TA from **Virginia** asks:

When will Rippon's station get some upgrades like Woodbridge? It's been asked more than once to have more benches for passengers to have a seat - which has never been seen.

VRE Management:

We will look into it.

Tom from Fairfax asks:

Will the new extension platform at Burke Centre have a canopy? If so, will the canopy include the entire length of both the new & old platform?

VRE Management:

The canopy will cover only the new section.

Dawn from Burke asks:

Yesterday's National Preparedness Month Message was far more negative than I expected from VRE. It came across that you KNOW there will be some real problems this fall. (I worry VRE risks the oak leaf oil problem rather than loading dry sand in the hoppers). What's being done to improve that situation? Also, what's the time line between train delays and activating alternatives? The not so steep grade between Rolling Road and Burke almost invites us to walk to the nearest station...I can hear the Safety guys scream at that idea, I know.

VRE Management:

The intent of yesterday's Train Talk was not to be negative, but to encourage people to take the long view of situations. Don't worry, we heed the advice as well and will work with the host railroads to reduce leaf oil slippage as much as possible to reduce delay to the trains. Unfortunately, rail systems across the world that operate in wooded areas deal with this issue and no one seems to have a good, inexpensive answer for it.

L from Manassas Park, VA asks:

What caused the delay on Manassas 337 on Monday evening? And why did it take so long to get notification from VRE (email, phone) that it was going to be significantly delayed?

VRE Management:

The engineer noticed smoke coming from a traction motor while stopped at Rolling Road. It was eventually able to get going again, but at a reduced speed. Our usual threshold to send out messages is when the delay reaches 20 minutes; we sent one out at 25. Mechanical delays are hard to predict, sometimes they get going right away, sometime they take a little longer, which is why we wait until the 20 minute mark to inform riders.

Tom from Crystal City asks:

What happens to the questions that are not answered in the allotted time of the forum?

VRE Management:

I try to answer the questions that will benefit the most riders, often there are a lot of repeats or questions that, quite frankly, are inappropriate. Any unanswered questions can be resubmitted the following month or sent to gotrains@vre.org

Ley from Fredericksburg asks:

Why doesn't VRE provide sufficient parking for people with disabilities? 18 is not sufficient.

VRE Management:

We provide the number of spaces required by law. When possible, we try to add more spaces if we have the capacity to do so.

Debbie O. from Broad Run, VA asks:

What is the latest update on the expansion to Haymarket?

VRE Management:

We are in the process of creating a request for proposals for environmental analysis and preliminary engineering.

Steve from Burke, Va asks:

The progress at the Burke Centre station is going very well. When do you expect the new platform to open? Also, really like the new "Stop" signs installed to help traffic keep moving and merging. Have you thought of any cross walks painted on the garage near the platform access areas?

VRE Management:

Thanks, I will pass that along and the platform extension (which will be covered by a canopy) should be open by December. The stop signs were installed by Fairfax County and I will ask them to look into the need for crosswalks in the garage, as they own it.

Dave from Lorton, VA asks:

Why does Train #307 operate so slowly almost every afternoon in the

Alexandria/Springfield area? Tell CS to stop issuing speed restrictions all the time and the engineering to speed up a bit.

VRE Management:

The construction is currently ongoing between Alexandria and Franconia/Springfield for a third track. On occasion temporary slow orders are put into effect if the track has been disturbed. Ultimately, this is short term pain for long term gain.

Mark from F'burg asks:

Status update on the express from F'burg?

VRE Management:

No real update, but I hope to have a better idea by spring. I will be sure to let you know if we find some. The cost has been included in our FY2011 budget.

Dead Zone from **Somewhere south of Quantico** asks:

The last Traintalk said we should carry extra cell phone batteries for emergencies. What good will that do when cell phones don't work between Quantico and Leeland? We are in the dead zone. More than once I have been on a train stopped somewhere in the dead zone, and can't call anyone to say I am delayed. What is the status of the new cell tower at Leeland?

VRE Management:

We are waiting for FTA approval of the environmental analysis for expansion of the Leeland lot by 200 spaces. Within that area, we will construct a tower. We anticipate to construction of the tower within the next six months.

Mark from F'burg asks:

I think VRE should start issuing some public statements in support of the spotsy county officials that voted in favor of joining. If two of the officials loose their election VRE will most likely loose in spotsy.

VRE Management:

VRE is not allowed to endorse any candidate although we do encourage riders to contact their officials and voice what is important to them.

Richard from Bristow, VA asks:

I take the 324's quiet car and in the afternoon I take the 327. This is not the first time I

have asked about this, but frankly, your new train cars are too cold. Cold air drops down giving the effect of a constant chill down one's back and, if not properly covered up(you will see some people with blankets over their head and shoulders), it can make for a very uncomfortable ride! Must you keep the air in the cars so cold?

VRE Management:

The fans constantly introduce fresh air into the train and is necessary to keep from getting stagnate air. We are looking into some methods of raising the temperature of a few test cars to see how you like it. Stay tuned to future Train Talks for more details.

Steve from Fairfax asks:

I know it's warming up again, but cold weather is coming. Can you remind NS & CSX that we often have switching problems with the first freezes (and it's worst on the early morning trains). Pneumatic switching has to be serviced appropriately to avoid condensation freezing and blocking the lines. It's been happening for the last nine years that I've witnessed.

VRE Management:

We perform annual preparations for winter and all the things that can go along with it. Part of that process is to talk to our host railroads about these types of issues. We will of course be working with them again this fall.

CB from Rippon to Alexandria asks:

The doors into the vestibule routinely automatically close on people when they're entering or exiting the seating areas. The response to this in the past has been a silly lesson in how to hold the door open (thank you Captain Obvious). Trouble is, often times people's hands are full with briefcases, bags, computers and the like, so they cannot hold the door open, and are merely trying to walk from point A to point B. Please look into a photoelectric eye, or syncing the vestibule doors with the outside doors.

VRE Management:

There are really two options to solving this problem: 1) You can wait for the door to close and use the kick plate to open the door or 2) you can grab the rubber stripping and bend it laterally which will cause the mechanism to reverse.

George from Burke, VA asks:

Can something be done to eliminate the escalator problems at Union Station? This morning, when leaving the Manasas #326 train at Union Station, the escalator was running in the wrong direction, and a large number of riders were forced to crowd onto the stairs. Have encountered the same condition (in reverse)in the evening at Union

Station, where it is even more troublesome with people rushing to the escalator to travel down to the platform to make their train. The conductors on the platform say they are powerless to help because they don't have a key needed to control the escalator

VRE Management:

I asked Amtrak to get them keys so they can resolve the issue. I will press them some more.

David from Gainesville VA asks:

Just wondering how the new ticket enforcement approved by the Virginia assembly is working and if anyone has gone to jail yet. Is this policy putting more stress on conductors? Hope they are doing fine.

VRE Management:

No one has gone to jail for fare evasion, nor would we want anyone to. We asked for the steeper penalties for those who counterfeit tickets or are repeatedly caught evading the fare. The conductors are handling it well and are handing out roughly the same number of summonses as before the revised law went into effect.

Matt from Manassas asks:

I have asked this question several times, but want to give it one more shot. The Broad Run Train 329 is severely overcrowded. We have people standing up and down the center walk way and elsewhere (steps ect.) This is no doubt a safety hazard. The late trains do not have sufficient people riding them to keep them profitable. Why not double up one of the trains during rush hour or add a car or two. This would eliminate the overcrowding issue. Can't wait to get all those new locomotives!

VRE Management:

I don't have a short term solution to 329. At this point in time I don't have any more parking spaces for more cars on this train. However, starting on Oct 1, there will be an Amtrak train leaving Union Station at 4:50 with express service to Burke Centre and Manassas. While it will cost \$10, maybe some of your fellow riders will find this to be worthwhile.

VRE Management:

Thank you for joining me. It is always interesting to hear what our riders are thinking. Hope you have a great September and I will see you next month on October 7th.