

RAILPASSENGERS



WEEKLY HOTLINE

Issue #1,378–December 20, 2024

Starting early 2025, we are changing the distribution list that we send the Hotline to each and every week. If you want to remain in the know and continue to receive this newsletter - please click the link below and fill out the short form.

Thank you!

[Click Here to Sign Up!](#)

Share your thoughts, feelings, and reactions to issues you may have had on a recent Amtrak trip. Thanks to your support and participation in previous surveys, we have been able to take the passenger's voice straight to Congress and Amtrak Executives. Help us keep hammering the message home by sharing this survey with other passengers!



Take our Survey

Association News

Happy Holidays!

Merry Christmas and
Happy Holidays

We hope you enjoy the season of
giving and have a good new year!



RAILPASSENGERS

ASSOCIATION

The Rail Passengers staff will be taking some time off to stretch their legs and reflect on the past year with friends and family over the next two weeks.

We would like to wish you all a very happy holiday season and a safe new year. **The office will reopen on Jan 6th and the Hotline will return on the 10th.**

Government Shutdown Looms Ahead of Holiday Travel Season

By Sean Jeans-Gail | Vice President of Gov't Affairs + Policy

A Christmas-themed government shutdown looks likely after President-elect Donald Trump intervened in Congressional budget negotiations this week, directing his allies to reject a bipartisan budget deal that would've extended current funding levels through March 14th, 2025, while also providing \$100 billion in disaster relief funds for states hit hard by extreme weather disasters this year.

In an effort spearheaded by Trump Administration allies Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, the President-elect spiked a bipartisan budget compromise mere days before the current budget is set to expire this evening. In its place, the Trump Administration backed an alternate bill that would've extended current funding levels through March 2025, stripped many of the [policy riders included in the bipartisan compromise](#), provided \$110 billion in disaster relief funding, and suspended the federal debt limit through January 2027. That bill was rejected by the Republican-controlled House by a vote of 174 to 235—with 38 House Republicans bucking Trump to join Democrats in killing the bill.

It's unclear how this impasse will be resolved, with President-elect Trump insisting that a debt limit suspension be part of any budget extension—a move that current Republicans in the House and Senate have strongly opposed in the recent past.

“Congress must get rid of, or extend out to, perhaps, 2029, the ridiculous Debt Ceiling,” he wrote on his Truth Social platform. “Without this, we should never make a deal.”

How Would a Shutdown Affect Passengers?

As we head into the busiest travel season of the year, many of our members have reached out to us asking whether their upcoming train trips will be disrupted by a government shutdown.

The simple answer: your holiday Amtrak trip won't be affected by the government shutdown. As we've seen during previous government shutdowns, Amtrak will be able to use its ticket revenue and other sources of funding to keep the trains running and workers paid in the near term.

The longer answer for passengers: everything depends on how long the government shutdown goes on. Amtrak can't operate indefinitely without receiving payments to its operations account for the Northeast Corridor and National Network. Based on prior government shutdowns, it is very unlikely that the shutdown will last long enough to affect Amtrak's day-to-day operations. But an extended shutdown of the Federal Railroad Administration and suspension of operational dispersals to Amtrak will degrade service, while also slowing down upgrades being funded by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Will New Amtrak Board Members Be Collateral Damage?

One possible side effect of the chaos surrounding the shutdown could be nominees to Amtrak's Board of Directors. On December 12, the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation [advanced the nominations](#) of David Capozzi, Ronald Batory, Elaine Clegg, and Lanhee Chen to be a directors on Amtrak Board of Directors on a bipartisan basis. The four nominees still need to be approved by the full Senate before the expiration of the current Congress or their nominations will expire. With the blessing of the Commerce Committee, the vote itself is a formality. However, it's unclear how the looming shutdown will affect limited floor time.

These nominees would bring a wealth of rail and transit industry experience, while also representing parts of the country that currently lack a voice on the Amtrak Board. The failure to advance four qualified nominees because of an unrelated political fracas—particularly one which is ultimately unlikely produce little tangible difference—would be a bitter pill to swallow for the passenger rail advocates who have been working hard to introduce new blood and new perspectives onto the Board.

At this point, these nominees are largely beholden to the larger shutdown drama. But you can still make your voice heard. **Simply call your Senators and ask them to “please vote to confirm the four Amtrak Board nominees before the end of the year.”**

[You can use our online advocacy tool](#), Senate switchboard can be reached at (202) 224-3121, where an operator can connect your Senator.

CALL YOUR SENATOR

N-S Gets More Time To Answer Justice Dept.

By Jim Mathews / President & CEO

Norfolk Southern now has until a week after the Inauguration to answer a Justice Dept. complaint filed this summer accusing the railroad of violating Amtrak's legal right to preferential dispatching.

Just before the Thanksgiving break, a Federal judge granted Norfolk Southern's motion asking for more time to respond to [the Justice Dept.'s July 30 civil complaint](#), which alleged that poor on-time performance for Amtrak's Crescent route between New York and New Orleans can be traced back to violations of the requirement in 49 U.S.C. § 24308(c).

Your Association was very pleased when Justice filed that action this summer. [In our view, it's long overdue.](#) Dispatching Amtrak trains so that they are late more than 80 percent of the time—month after month, year after year—cannot be explained by bad weather, or supply chain disruptions, or any other operational vagaries. These trains didn't have to be as late as they are, as routinely as they are. This is especially true now that the trains' schedules have been certified by both the host railroad and by Amtrak.

[Click here to read more](#)

Superliner Replacements: Challenges And Solutions

By Rail Passengers Staff

Amtrak's ambitious Long Distance Fleet Replacement (LDFR) program, poised to redefine its long-distance services, faces significant risks [according to a report from Amtrak's Office of Inspector General \(OIG\)](#), but management has already addressed concerns about the number of car types and their complex designs, and expects to have responded to OIG's remaining concerns by March.

Revised proposals from car builders are expected by the end of this month, which means that Amtrak faces pivotal decisions that will shape the future of its long-distance service for decades.

With an estimated cost of \$7 billion for its first phase, [the program aims to replace aging equipment across nine of its 15 long-distance routes](#). However, delays, unclear management structures, and complex design requirements pose critical challenges, OIG said, flagging unclear lines of management authority as a particular risk for the Superliner replacement effort.

The audit, issued December 13, highlights the inherent complexity of procuring new bilevel railcars with untested designs and features, such as onboard elevators for passengers with disabilities.

Amtrak executives recognized the challenges that emerged during the Request for Information and Request for Proposal stages. When car-builders told Amtrak that what they were asking to do was potentially too difficult to deliver on time and on budget, management reshaped the procurement process, adapted the RFP, and extended the deadline for car-builders to respond to the solicitation.

[Continue reading on our website](#)

Rail Passengers Supports Fed-State Grant Applications

By Rail Passengers Staff

The Rail Passengers Association this week offered formal support to the Federal Railroad Administration for two important grant applications under the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail program – the umbrella program of physical improvements in and around Chicago Union Station, and efforts to move the Texas high-speed rail program into final design and construction.

Rail Passengers President & CEO Jim Mathews offered two support letters for the programs this week, writing to FRA Administrator Amit Bose to urge the agency to award Fed-State/National grant funds to both of these efforts.

"The Texas project will transform travel between two of the fastest-growing metropolitan regions in the U.S., contribute significantly not just to the region's economy but to American economic well-being, dramatically improve travel times for millions of Texans and visitors, plug a serious gap in Amtrak's national network, and demonstrate to Americans – and to the world – that the U.S. can still develop and build great things," Mathews said in his letter to Bose.

Mathews also noted that despite delays at the hands of cynical litigation in Texas, Amtrak's Texas High-Speed Rail project is now making good

progress, and with funding from Step 3 of the Corridor Identification and Development Program (CIDP), Amtrak is currently advancing the project through the Project Development stage, which will demonstrate its readiness for the Final Design and Construction stages. The Texas program got a \$64 million grant this Fall to finalize the Project Development phases.

[Continue here](#)

Field Notes

Historical Preservation

Hotline Exclusive

By Joe Terrey, Rail Passengers Intern

This week I had the opportunity to see the old PCC Car 3295 at Boylston station on the MBTA's Green Line. PCC streetcars, short for President's Conference Committee, were first produced in 1936, designed to be lightweight, comfortable, and quiet. They quickly became extremely popular, with their use peaking during the Postwar boom of the 1940s and 50s. The MTA (the predecessor of the MBTA) had inherited a number of PCC cars from its takeover of the Boston Elevated Railway in 1947, which worked well enough for them to order 50 new cars in 1951, of which car 3295 was one. Constructed in Worcester, MA, these specific models were known as Boston Picture Windows, named for their double width windows, enabling passengers to enjoy the scenery on their commute. Car 3295 ran on the Riverside Line, and was retired in the 1970s as the MBTA began replacing the PCC cars. Thankfully, between 1983-1984 it was completely renovated by the 'Friends of 3295,' an organization formed by nostalgic members of the MBTA Carmen's Union, and was put on display at Boylston, where it remains to this day.

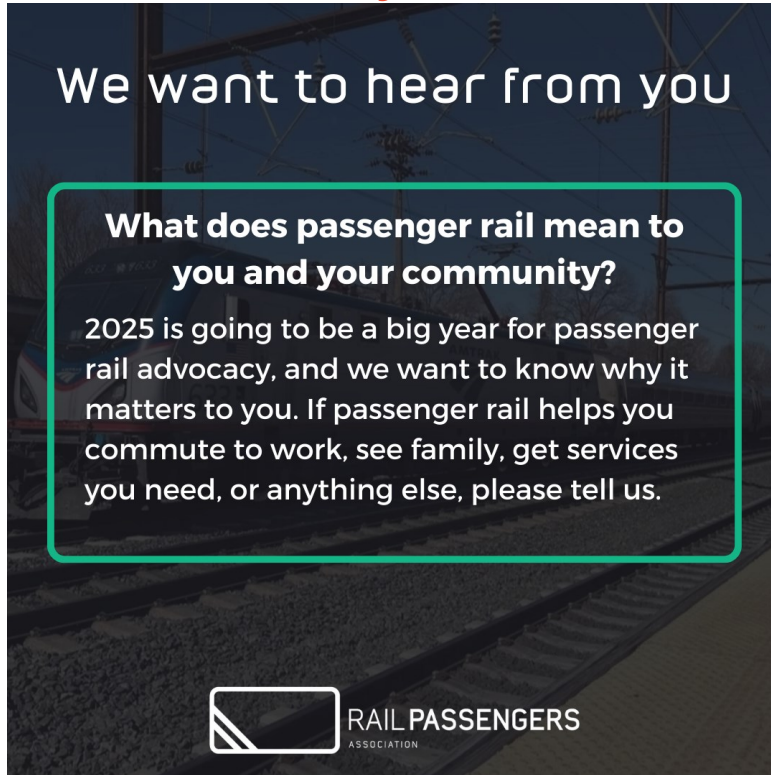


Unfortunately, the section of Boylston where the PCC car is located, is not exactly accessible. In order to access it, you have to take the Green Line inbound from Arlington, and get off at the next station, or go in from the inbound headhouse in Boston Common. There is no crossover from the outbound tracks. The car itself is located behind a massive metal fence, presumably to prevent graffiti, which makes taking photos quite difficult. The area is very dark and frankly a little creepy, with a large pile of old steel and chairs giving the impression that it has not been maintained in a while. The car itself however seems to be in good condition, with a relatively fresh coat

of paint, and intact windows, and informative plaques, something which cannot be said for all rail displays. Despite all this, having Car 3295 in Boylston, right where people get off the train on their commute, as opposed to a museum, makes it easier for Bostonians to see part of the city's rich history of rail transport on a daily basis. The MBTA overall has done a fantastic job at this, with plaques, pictures, and displays at many of the central stops explaining the history of the station. Through this, people who otherwise would not be railfans, and just use the T to commute, can get a sense of the centrality of rail transport to Boston's development, and the need for its expansion. By learning more about an era where light rail was the norm, with streetcars like 3295 taking the role that automobiles and buses do now, Bostonians can fall in love with trains again, pushing them into the waiting arms of rail advocacy

Please email [Joe Aiello](mailto:Joe.Aiello@railpassengers.org) if you have any local, state or regional stories that you would like to share.


What's Your Story?



We want to hear from you

What does passenger rail mean to you and your community?

2025 is going to be a big year for passenger rail advocacy, and we want to know why it matters to you. If passenger rail helps you commute to work, see family, get services you need, or anything else, please tell us.



We're gearing up for a big year of advocacy in 2025, and we want your stories to help us connect to elected officials, government agencies, and local advocates on why passenger rail matters.

We want you to tell us what passenger rail means to you and your community. Whether it helps you commute to work, see family and friends, get services you need, or anything else, please tell us.

Tell Us Your Story!

RAILNATION:DC 2025



RAILNATION: DC 2025

**Regional Summits
& Day on the Hill**

March 24th - April 3rd, 2025

Rail Passengers Office & Conference Room



Come to DC to tell members of Congress **YOUR** passenger-rail story! This year, our Spring RailNation:DC events will expand to include two full weeks of visits to Capitol Hill, and we need you to stand up and be counted! Visits, along with workshops to help you prepare, will take place over a two-week period from March 24th to April 3rd and will be broken into sessions for nine

regions around the country.



[REGISTER HERE!](#)

Hotline Links

A curated selection of passenger rail and transportation stories from this week. Check out our social media feeds on [Twitter](#) & [Facebook](#) to read breaking news and join the conversation!

- [Elaine Clegg's Amtrak nomination inches forward](#), **Boise State Public Radio**

Elaine Clegg, friend of the Association and current CEO of Valley Regional Transit in Boise's metro area, is one step closer to being seated on Amtrak's Board of Directors.

- [Amtrak To Boost Midwest Rail Service. A Union Station Makeover Is Next](#), **Block Club Chicago**

In order to help get Amtrak to their 2040 ridership goal, Chicago's Union Station is going to get some long-awaited station and track upgrades.

- [Lawmakers provide update on Moline-Chicago Amtrak project with federal funding set to expire](#), **WQAD**

Thanks to a former IL governor who refused to use state funds and an uncooperative Class II - over \$170M in fed funding has sat untouched since 2010. Three lawmakers are looking for an extension and are (finally) bringing parties to the table.

- [CTrail Runs First-Ever Hartford Line Toys For Tots Train](#), **Railfan & Railroad Magazine**

The Hartford Line's first ever Toys For Tots (by Train) went so well for all those involved - they are already looking towards next holiday season.

- [CREATE receives \\$290M for next phase of 75th Street Corridor work](#), **Progressive Railroadng**

The work being done on Chicago's largest rail chokepoint is closer to being completed thanks to a boost of funding from the USDOT's Multimodal Project Discretionary Grant program.

- [KDOT estimates \\$311 million price tag to expand passenger rail service](#), **Derby Informer**

Now show the benefits of the expansion...

- [Fort Worth passenger rail boom reflects Amtrak's growth](#), **Fort Worth Report**

Amtrak's systemwide growth is being seen in the individual communities along the routes it serves.

- [G line getting popular 'open-gangway' cars next year in MTA's pricy new train buy](#), **NBC New York**

Brooklyn's 2nd busiest line is getting a flashy new upgrade starting in the Spring.

- [Boston's South Station: Where to eat, drink and wait](#), **Axios**

Riding the corridor up the Beantown? Here are a couple of tips from Axios on what to do when you get there.



[WE ARE NOW ON BLUE SKY!](#)

If you aren't following Rail Passengers on social media, you should be!

Upcoming Events

Please contact Joe Aiello (jaiello@narprail.org) to have a local, state or regional meeting added to the Rail Passengers calendar (print and on-line) of upcoming events!

Staff Updates

Your staff is at the table, in the field, having the conversations that make a difference for passengers across the country. Learn what they're up to each week and how you can support your Association's key missions!

- **Jim Mathews, President & CEO**, spent his last few days in Washington before the break working on end-of-year business items and meeting with partners to plan for 2025.
- **Sean Jeans Gail, Vice President of Policy**, spent the week preparing for the 119th Congress and our 2025 advocacy calendar, meeting with RPA staff and outside stakeholder groups to identify opportunities for collaboration.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, continued closing November financials with our Accounting partner, worked on end of year fundraising messages, and tended to the administrative and operational needs of the Association.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, worked on wrapping up a number of outreach odds & ends as we get ready to close the office for the holidays.
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Manager Consultant**, focused on working with several new members this week on accessing their *new member login*. She would like to welcome our new members and remind everyone that when they create an account on our website, they can manage their membership, register for events, add family members to their membership, and access their member benefits all in one place. You can always access our User Center 24/7 at membership.railpassengers.org/usercenter/ If you have created your account and forgot your password, you can always enter your User ID and hit the forgot password button and you will be emailed a link to help you reset your password. **Happy Holidays to all!**
- **Lili Leonard, Development Assistant**, focused on wrapping up some development operations as we head into the holidays. See you in 2025!



Rail Passengers Webinar Series

Miss out on our past events? You can watch them on our [YouTube channel](#) or through our website at railpassengers.org/webinars



Holiday Merch Drop!

OUR ICONIC STATEMENT

For years, the "I'd Rather Be On The Train" bumper sticker was a favorite among our members, with many requesting extras, so they could share with their family & friends. Over time, one of the most asked questions whenever we are in the field has been if we are ever going to bring that sticker back (one day!).

We are, **ONCE AGAIN**, dusting off this classic statement for our holiday merch drop - and this year, with a well known historic twist,

Just as with past holiday designs, this offering is limited, so get your orders in now!

Do you own Association gear? Show us your selfies and let us know what products you want to see next! Contact [Joe Aiello](#) for merch information and questions about our products.



Rail Passengers Timetables

Updated 12/02/2024

Thanks to a collaborative effort between Rail Passengers NYS Council Member Nathanael Nerode & [juckins.net](#)'s Chris Juckins, we have been able to completely update our timetables resource page.

[CLICK HERE](#)



Do more with your donations. If you have questions about employer match, gifting a membership, or other questions about how to make a bigger impact, let us know! Your staff is here to help with:

- Online Donations
- Donor Advised Funds
- Employer Match
- RPA Signature Visa Card
- Gift of Membership
- and More!

With multiple secure, protected methods of payment, you have more flexibility in the way dues are paid. Skip the hassle and [contact us](#) today for help setting up automatic or online payments.

- Setup ACH or E-Check with your bank of choice
- Use a Debit or Credit Card to pay online, or
- Send a check to 1200 G Street NW Suite 520 Washington, DC 20005

Other Ways to Make an Impact this Holiday Season

Did you know that individual donors make up more than two-thirds (67%) of charitable giving in the U.S., and that many of those donations are made in the last two months of the year? As you make your year-end giving plans, please consider a contribution to Rail Passengers Association using the methods below – making a meaningful difference for passenger rail in the

U.S. while maximizing your tax advantages and fulfilling minimum retirement withdrawal requirements.

Donor Advised Fund (DAF)

Donor-advised funds are the fastest-growing charitable giving vehicle in the United States because they are one of the easiest and most tax-advantageous ways to give to charity. [Click here](#) to learn more and consult with your financial advisor to determine if establishing a Donor Advised Fund is right for you.

Required Minimum Distribution (RMD)

Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) are minimum amounts that IRA and retirement plan account owners generally must withdraw annually starting with the year they reach age 73. [Click here](#) to learn more about RMDs and consult with your financial advisor to determine if an RMD is right for you.

Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD)

A Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) is a direct transfer of assets from an IRA to a qualified charity. QCDs are a popular way for Americans 70 ½ years or older to donate to charity while also satisfying their RMDs. [Click here](#) to learn more about QCDs and consult with your financial advisor to determine if a QCD is right for you.

Member & Donor Notices

- **The Rail Passengers Association is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. Our federal tax identification number is 36-2615221**
- **To help facilitate dissemination of electronic thank you receipts,** please make sure your contact information, **specifically your email address,** is up-to-date in your Neon profile.
- **If you need assistance with your membership,** please call the Office at 202-408-8362.
- **While our staff continues to work remotely, we are unable to provide permanent membership cards.** You can print a temporary membership card by creating an account at www.railpassengers.org (select "My Account" on the homepage).
- **Complete all information!** -- Before sealing your envelope, PLEASE double-check the credit card information on the buck slip!
 - Print credit card information clearly.
 - **Include an expiration date, month and year, as well as the CVV number.**
 - Without **COMPLETE** information, your membership renewal or donation can't be processed.
- **If you have your financial institution send a check on your behalf,** without a buckslip, PLEASE instruct them to add:
 - a notation in the memo field if the payment is for membership dues or a donation, AND,
 - your Rail Passengers Association member ID. If we have multiple members with the same name, i.e., John Smith, it can be hard to identify the correct member to attribute the payment, without the member ID.



Rail Passengers Association members have access to a full service, nationwide federal credit union with extensive product and service offerings. Signature FCU is the exclusive provider of the [Rail Passengers Association-branded Visa credit card](#) with our logo, which supports our work by giving back to

Charity Navigator



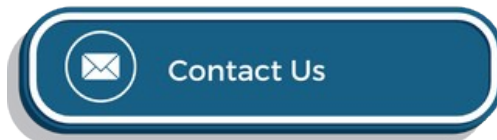
✦ FOUR-STAR ✦

Rail Passengers Association Earns Coveted 4-Star Rating from Charity Navigator

our organization, and gives you 1 point for every \$1 you spend to redeem for travel and merchandise. The card has no annual fee, no balance transfer fees, no foreign transaction fees, and has a very low interest rate.

Rail Passengers Association's strong financial health and commitment to accountability and transparency have earned it a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator, America's largest independent charity evaluator. Our Charity Navigator profile can be found by clicking [here](#).

If you have questions, feedback, or submissions for next week's hotline, send us your thoughts! Help us spread the word about your local, regional, and national passenger rail wins.



THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS:



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EST. 1967

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