

# RAILPASSENGERS



## WEEKLY HOTLINE

Issue #1,381—January 24, 2025

Starting in February, 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!



## Association News

### House Transportation Committee Previews Rail Agenda

[by Sean Jeans-Gail | VP of Policy + Gov't Affairs](#)

The House Transportation & Infrastructure Subcommittee on Railroads held its inaugural hearing yesterday, taking a broad look at the freight and passenger rail industry and spotlighting priorities for the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization.

Congressman Daniel Webster (R-FL), the newly appointed chair of the rail subcommittee, opened the hearing by stressing the need to maintain high levels of safety in the rail industry. Unfortunately, he also used his statement to resuscitate flawed arguments about the need for Amtrak to reorganize its operations and network in order to make a profit.

"Passenger rail works best where demand is high, competition and private sector involvement are ample, and a dependence on government support is low," said Chairman Webster. "For Amtrak, we must look at improving and maintaining its existing network, weaning it off government support, and providing competitive, reliable, and safe service to attract riders. Amtrak should serve as an appealing option for travel, not as a replacement for vehicles and airplanes, which remain the overwhelming preference for Americans."

*Rail Passengers* [has long argued](#) that it's not about whether a passenger rail route makes money, it's about *who* makes money from a particular route. Trains are part of the category of public services that make money by acting as economic engines in the communities they serve—no different than roads, utilities, and other publicly-sponsored infrastructure.

Thankfully, Congressman Seth Moulton (D-MA) was on hand to point out that highways are heavily subsidized, having received [\\$275 billion in](#)

“Mr. Chairman... you talked about decreasing dependence on government funding for railroads. It’s interesting that you don’t talk about decreasing dependence on government funding for highways or airlines. We’ve subsidized highways and airlines to the tune of... hundreds of billions of dollars over the decades,” said Congressman Moulton. “It’s interesting that the freight railroad system is asked to compete against this heavily subsidized alternative. Freight railroads are really the only transportation system in America that funds its own infrastructure through private sector, right? President Trump has instituted this new department of government efficiency; I think the idea is that the government should invest in efficiency, and perhaps not subsidize inefficiency. So if the only transportation system efficient enough to pay for its own infrastructure is freight rail, then why do we continue spending billions and billions of taxpayer dollars every year subsidizing highways and truckers?”

[To read more, including a Rail Passengers letter to the White House and a take action alert, click here](#)

## Time To Re-balance The ‘Balancing Act’?

[By Jim Mathews, President & CEO](#)

It was deadly, bitterly, life-threateningly cold this week throughout the U.S. [The worst of it was in the upper Midwest and our northern states along the Canadian border](#), but even the South got into the act. The friends I spent my childhood with in the Siberianoid provinces of upstate New York now live in New Orleans, where this week they giddily made a snowman in their front yard. And I got to experience it first-hand this week with a work trip to Eau Claire, Wis., where I awoke on Tuesday morning to minus-31 degrees.

It is against that backdrop that Amtrak cancelled many, many trains, a maddening number of trains. I may have missed a few, but by my count at least 27 trains got sidelined by the deep cold: the state-supported (read, “state-funded”) River Runner, the Lincoln service, the new going-like-gangbusters Borealis, the Hiawatha, the Wolverine, and the Carl Sandburg all took a hit, as did the long-distance/National Network Empire Builder, Sunset Limited, Texas Eagle, and City of New Orleans.

Passengers, advocates, and yes, state DOTs were all taken aback. Reactions ranged from bewildered to belligerent. Many aggrieved riders noted that commuter services not run by Amtrak somehow kept running. A few DOTs told me they didn’t get enough notice and that, in any case, cold-weather cancellations are coming too often to keep a viable service running. They also want Amtrak to take a harder look at why they can’t keep pipes thawed, coaches running, and locomotives in service when the winter comes, as it inevitably does every single year.

When I shared with one of my DOT contacts that forecasts called for 50 degrees below zero in North Dakota, they acknowledged that that’s simply too cold to run: “I’ll give you minus 30, or 40, or something like that. But they’re cancelling sometimes when it’s just zero. Or minus two. And that’s not compatible with running a competitive service.”

Indeed.

[Read more from Jim here](#)

## Upholding Preference Vindicates The Will Of Congress

[By Rail Passengers Staff](#)

The Rail Passengers Association on Wednesday argued to the Surface Transportation Board – the Federal economic regulator of railroads – that any decision in its Union Pacific proceeding that would weaken passenger priority over freight would thwart the will of dozens of Congresses dating back half a century.

In its brief, filed at the invitation of the STB as a “non-party reply” to the briefs of the parties in the two-year-old late-trains case between Union Pacific and Amtrak over chronic *Sunset Limited* delays, your Association asked the Board – again – to hold UP accountable for consistently and repeatedly violating Amtrak’s 52-year-old legal right to priority over freight traffic.

**[Click [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) for more detailed reports on the proceeding, its current status, and its purposes.]**

For decades, the American people have consistently elected enough members of Congress who support passenger rail to ensure Amtrak’s survival and funding. And for the past decade, Americans have consistently elected members of Congress who support – and have funded – actually expanding passenger rail, strengthening Amtrak’s long-distance service, and protecting the legal rights of America’s passengers to be on time. The core of the Association’s argument before the Board is that those Americans deserve to have their votes fulfilled through the STB holding Union Pacific accountable.

“Our members, and the travelling public at large, pay their fares based upon a reasonable expectation that they will arrive at or close to their scheduled arrival time,” the Association said in its non-party reply. “Congress set out that expectation in the Amtrak Improvement Act of 1973, Pub. L. No. 93-146, § 10(2), 87 Stat. 548, 552. Significantly, during the past 50 years since passage, 25 successive Congresses have maintained that provision, reaffirming again and again that the travelling public should expect best efforts at on-time performance through Amtrak’s legal right to ‘preference over freight transportation in using a rail line, junction, or crossing’ 49 U.S.C. § 24308(c).”

[Click here to continue](#)

## Congratulations, Lenny!

By Rail Passengers Staff

Meet Lenny...although in some ways, you already have. You see, since mid-year last year when Lenny started his internship with us, a lot of what you’ve read and seen and shared and reacted to on our social-media channels came from Lenny.

As a communications intern with us, his job was to work closely with our professional staff – Ned Butler, once a former fabulous intern with us as well who “graduated” to lead our comms function for a couple of years; Joe Aiello, our grassroots field Director, our Policy team led by VP for Government Affairs Sean Jeans-Gail, and our President & CEO, Jim Mathews – to get their words, their pictures, and their ideas out into the world.



Lenny’s touch was pretty obvious: snappy graphics just crying out to be shared, multiple posts on important topics, and being Jonny-on-the-spot (Lenny-on-the-spot?) when Sean or Jim wrote or spoke publicly or in the press on things like late trains, Amtrak funding, customer-service issues, or Amtrak transparency.

But it was also obvious in ways all of you probably don’t see or realize. Our data show that you opened and read our digital newsletters more. They also show that you shared our content on your own pages – BlueSky, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and all the rest – about a third again more than you did a year ago. Our web traffic went up, too. For a nonprofit devoted to spreading the word about passenger rail, more shared content and more traffic means “mission accomplished”!

[Read more about Lenny here](#)

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## Press Releases

### Rail Passengers Welcomes Long-Distance Report To Congress

**(Washington, D.C.)** – Rail Passengers Association this morning welcomed the Federal Railroad Administration’s long-awaited report to Congress prioritizing 15 new long-distance passenger rail routes and endorsing restoration of daily service to both Amtrak’s *Cardinal* and *Sunset Limited* long-haul trains.

More than two years in the making, the report confirms a preliminary group of 15 routes worth moving on for additional study, with Houston to New York City topping the FRA priority list. Next highest was a Chicago-Miami

connection that fulfills a lot of calls for restoring the Floridian. Apart from a daily *Cardinal* and *Sunset*, FRA's report will assume the North Coast Hiawatha relaunch as a priority because it has already been advanced into the next development stage in FRA's Corridor ID program.

"This report is exciting, bold, and potentially transformational," said Rail Passengers Association President Jim Mathews. "Just as we said in the summer when the preliminary draft of the report was complete, we think FRA's study is a great start, despite gaps in some of the analysis and recommendations. We need to do everything we can to ensure that Congress embraces its conclusions and sets the stage for multi-year commitments to growth."

Nonetheless, the Association also cautioned that as outlined, the recommendations could take far too long to deliver real gains to Americans who have been waiting patiently for decades to see improvements.

"We need more short-term, practical route investments to show how it can be done quickly and well," Mathews added. "That means doing a few routes now where it can make sense, along the lines of bringing back the Broadway Limited or connecting New Orleans to St. Louis."

[Read the report here](#)

## Rail Passengers Congratulates Fuchs On STB Appointment

**(Washington, D.C.)** -- Rail Passengers Association congratulates Patrick Fuchs on his appointment, announced today, as the new Chair of the Surface Transportation Board.

"This is a wise and solid selection by the Trump Administration," said Association President & CEO Jim Mathews. "He brings a broad base of knowledge to this role, ranging from his time in the Executive Branch to his service with Sen. John Thune helping to craft the then-revolutionary Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act, and beyond.

"Since joining the STB," Mathews continued, "he has proven over and over again to be insightful, thoughtful, and committed to understanding root causes of thorny problems while working in a bipartisan way to solve them. We look forward to working with him, not only as an Association but also through our membership on the STB's Passenger Rail Advisory Committee."

Fuchs succeeds Robert Primus in the role, who assumed the Chair last May upon the departure of Martin Obermann. Fuchs was sworn in as an STB member on Jan. 17, 2019, and reconfirmed by the U.S. Senate on May 14, 2024. His second term expires Jan. 14, 2029, according to his bio on the STB website.

## Field Notes



Rail Passengers Association Board Chair Meredith Richards and Luigi Rosa, Amtrak Assistant Vice President for the Frederick Douglas Tunnel Program, at the January 21st meeting of the Washington Area Railway Engineering Society, in Baltimore, Maryland. Luigi and his team discussed the engineering challenges of the project. Meredith has been assisting Luigi with community engagement. Rail Passengers Board members Ken Briers and Dick Bruss also attended the dinner.

Please email [Joe Aiello](#) if you have any local, state or regional stories/projects that you would like to see get highlighted in the Hotline.

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## 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.

## RailNation DC Regional Gatherings



**March 24th & 25th** - Northeast and Mid-Atlantic

**March 26th & 27th** - Southeast, Southern and South Central

**March 31st & April 1st** - Midwest

**April 2nd & April 3rd** - Northwest, Southwest and Mountains/Plains

**NOTICE!** We have received a number of emails from registrants who have been confused by the date listed on the confirmation email. The system we use is defaulting to the first day of the regional sessions, which is March

24th. We are working with the CRM team to correct this, but for now - if you have registered for any of the other dates, those are the dates you attend in DC. Please email our Director of Community Engagement & Organizing, Joe Aiello at [jaiello@narprail.org](mailto:jaiello@narprail.org) if you have any further questions.

**REGISTER HERE!**

**Registration ends at midnight eastern on March 14th, 2025**

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## 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!

- [\[VIDEO\] 'It is a big deal': Elaine Clegg sworn in as Amtrak board member](#), KTVB

We have to agree with the headline, this is a big deal!

- [Why We Cancel Trains Ahead of Extreme Weather Events](#), Railway Age

Gerhard "Gery" Williams, Amtrak's Executive Vice President, Service Delivery & Operations, talks to Railway Age on the unfortunate need to and the factors that go into cutting service during the blistering cold a good portion of the nation is currently experiencing.

- [How Union Terminal Became an Iconic Cincinnati Landmark](#), Ohio Magazine

Cincinnati's Union Terminal is one of the true wonders on the National Network, but sadly is it absolutely underused with middle-of-the-night train service.

- [Future of Milwaukee streetcar clouded by limited funding and operations challenges](#), Wisconsin Public Radio

From its 2018 launch to this year's expansion to Summerfest Grounds, The Hop has been a vital part of Milwaukee's downtown! However, a grant application mishap and recent legislation (Wis. Act 12) is limiting funding options for future development.

- [Massachusetts governor proposes \\$8 billion transportation plan for state](#), Trains

MA Governor Healey's FY26 budget proposal is set to boost transit with \$857M from surplus Fair Share funding & \$765M through borrowing. Key projects include \$1.4B for MBTA improvements & advancing the East-West Rail project, linking Boston & Western MA.

- [VPRA Selects Construction Partner for Long Bridge Project - South Package](#), RT&S

ICYMI- The Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA) has found partners in Trumbull Corp., Fay, S&B Construction, and Wagman Heavy Civil, Inc. for the \$2.3B Long Bridge Project.

- [What do Greater Oklahoma City Chamber leaders want to see from the legislative session?](#), Oklahoman

The expansion of the Heartland Flyer is part of a long list of priorities set by the Greater Oklahoma Chamber for 2025.

- [The Major Cities That Still Don't Use Amtrak](#), The Travel

This is something we keep fighting for: more trains, to MORE PLACES, for more people. We would like to see this list get smaller and smaller as we go on.



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

If you aren't following Rail Passengers on social media, you should be! We are covering all the breaking news America's passengers need to stay informed on local, regional, and national issues.

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## Upcoming Events

- [RIARP Winter Meeting](#)  
Monday, January 27, 5:30p

- [RailNation: DC 2025](#)  
March 24–April 3
- [21st Annual Southwestern Rail Conference](#)  
April 7–8

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

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## 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 a few days in Wisconsin bundled up to face minus-31 degrees ( ! ) to present to the West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition, where he also took the opportunity to visit with Wisconsin DOT officials. Then it was back home to keep up conversations with congressional offices, to try to find out more about potential Amtrak cuts from the incoming Trump Administration, and to file our non-party reply at the Surface Transportation Board in Amtrak's late-trains case against Union Pacific.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, spent the week tracking Executive Orders issued by the incoming Trump Administration and preparing for Congressional hearings on transit and rail.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, continued processing membership dues and donations sent by mail to the DC office in December and January. When taking a break from data entry, Jonsie tended to the administrative and operational needs of the Association.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, followed this week's T&I hearing on passenger and freight rail, spoke to members through calls/emails on the numerous weather-related Amtrak cancelations, held a "listening session" with members of our Council via email on some key topics to be covered during our RailNation: DC regional workshops.
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Consultant**, has been diligently focused on data entry and preparing end-of-year tax receipts to ensure they are ready to send to our loyal donors and members by the end of January. She extends her gratitude for everyone's patience as we work through the intricacies of our Neon and Charity Engine software to maintain accuracy and tax compliance. Additionally, Kimberly has been handling administrative tasks, including processing lapsed memberships, renewals, and donations received throughout the week.
- **Lili Leonard, Development Assistant**, continues to conduct outreach to companies and organizations in the rail industry to join the Association's newly-formed Business Advisory Council. Starting this spring, we will begin outreach in earnest to tourism and visitors' bureaus, chambers of commerce, and economic development groups across the country to become members of our Community Partners Program.

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**Thank you for your generosity! Staff is currently working to complete the data entry of the checks sent to the DC Headquarters office in December and to-date in January. We appreciate your patience as staff is typing away diligently to enter the information to make accurate tax receipts available.**



## 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](http://railpassengers.org/webinars)*





## Holiday Merch Drop!

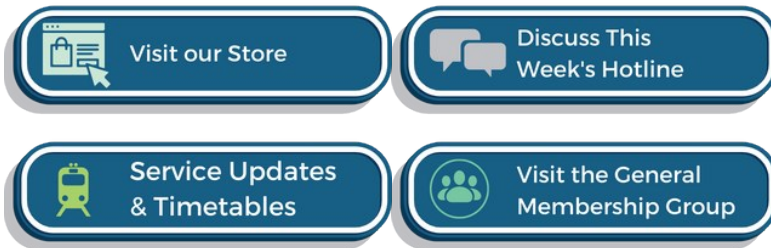
### OUR ICONIC STATEMENT

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 1/9/2025

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](#)

LOOKING FOR SMARTER  
WAYS TO DONATE?



MAKING A CONTRIBUTION  
HAS NEVER BEEN EASIER!

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.

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## 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](http://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 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.

## Navigator



◆ FOUR-STAR ◆

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

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](#).

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**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.**



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THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS:



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EST. 1967

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