



Photo credit: Bruce Treichler



FRIDAY HOTLINE

#1410

SEPTEMBER 12TH, 2025



**NOTE:** Our office has been getting a number of questions as of late about our printed "Passengers Voice" newsletter. We, unfortunately, stopped production in the Spring of 2020 and, as of this notice, do not have plans to start up again.

## Association News

### Liability Insurance Could Stop Our Trains. Here's How We Fix It.



#### WHY INSURANCE COULD STOP THE TRAINS

##### THE PROBLEM

Passenger trains can't run without liability insurance. But right now, commuter railroads are struggling to buy enough coverage – and some could be forced to cut service.



#### WHAT'S AN INSURANCE "TOWER"?

##### BUILDING A TOWER OF COVERAGE

Federal law requires passenger railroads to carry \$400 million in coverage.

No single insurer will take all that risk – so agencies "stack" layer after layer of policies. The Tower keeps getting taller... and more expensive.



#### THE CATCH

##### PREMIUMS ARE SKYROCKETING

Costs aren't based on passenger rail's strong safety record. Instead, rates are being driven by freight accidents, inflation, and global re-insurance markets.

Result: Agencies pay more for coverage they may not even be able to buy next year.



#### HOW WE CAN KEEP TRAINS RUNNING

##### THE FIX

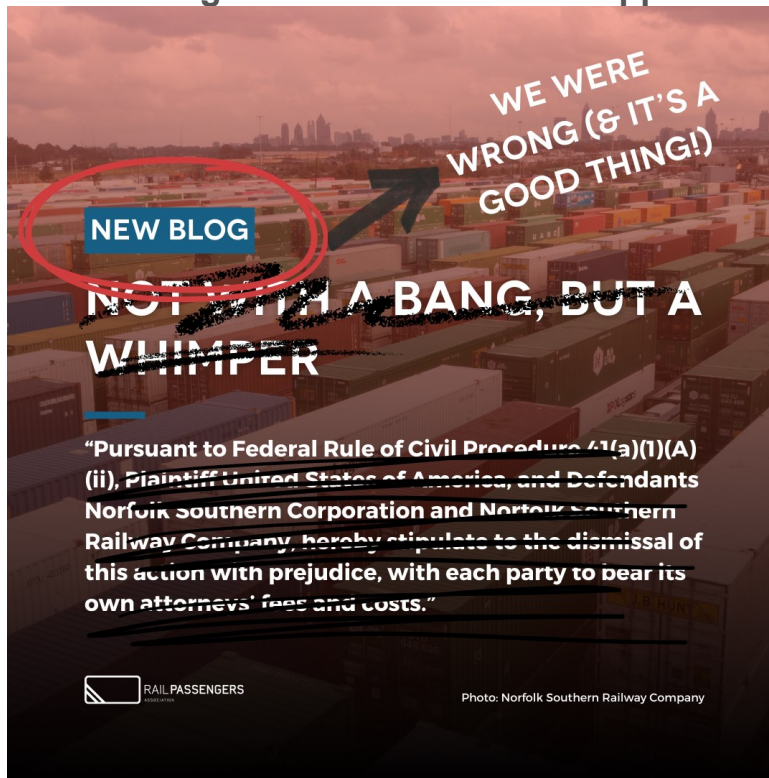
- A Federal backstop (like terrorism insurance)
- STB authority to regulate coverage
- Tiered caps or regional insurance pools

**Bottom Line:** Without insurance, trains don't run. We need Congress to act.



[\[CLICK HERE TO READ MORE\]](#)

**I Was Wrong. And I Could Not Be Happier.**



[by Jim Mathews / President & CEO](#)

When Norfolk Southern and the U.S. Justice Dept. filed their settlement motion in Federal court yesterday, [I was deeply skeptical](#) that it would be good news for passengers.

I was wrong.

And I could not be happier.

Hats off to the Justice Dept. for taking steps to put passengers first – as the law requires.

“Americans traveling by train are entitled to trips free from delays caused by railroads failing to give Amtrak preference over freight trains,” Assistant Attorney General Brett Shumate of the Justice Department’s Civil Division, said in [a prepared statement yesterday announcing the deal](#). “The settlement...as well as Norfolk Southern’s improved performance on Amtrak’s Crescent Route, demonstrates the Department of Justice’s commitment to protecting everyday American train passengers.”

Here's what Norfolk Southern signed up to:

Amtrak trains will get not just priority, but “highest priority” in dispatching on Norfolk Southern territory. N-S dispatchers will get extra training to ensure Amtrak priority, and if there’s a non-emergency situation that requires Amtrak trains to lose priority, a dispatcher’s supervisor must approve it. And Norfolk Southern has to provide the Justice Dept. with records on any delays involving the Crescent – the route whose poor timekeeping prompted DOJ’s initial action in Federal court in July 2024.

Norfolk Southern’s Vice President of Compliance will annually certify to DOJ that Norfolk Southern is keeping up its end of the agreement and its obligations under the law to provide Amtrak trains preference. There are a lot of (former) shady defense contractors in jail right now for “certifying” things to DOJ or the Defense Dept. that weren’t true. This is a serious commitment.

In its statement yesterday announcing the settlement, DOJ pointed out that ever since Justice hauled Norfolk Southern into Federal court, the number of delay minutes on Amtrak’s Crescent trains has declined 53 percent.

How curious...

It’s still true that because of this settlement, and the similar settlement reached between Amtrak and Union Pacific over its Surface Transportation Board case, we still won’t have a formal adjudication on just what it means, precisely, for a railroad to give Amtrak trains “preference.” The 52-year-old statute – [49 U.S.C. § 24308\(c\)](#) – reads that host railroads must give Amtrak “preference over freight transportation in using a rail line, junction, or crossing” unless: (1) there is an emergency; or (2) a host railroad asks the STB for relief, and the STB orders otherwise.

But even so, I’m incredibly encouraged that the Justice Dept. has remained consistent, holding to the position it took last year that when host railroads engage in a pattern and practice of dispatching Amtrak trains without preference, it’s against the law. The very first line in DOJ’s statement

yesterday uses the phrase “in violation of Federal law,” and the statement repeated that construction later.

We may not have a formal definition of “preference” either from a Federal judge or the STB, but we have clearly expressed congressional intent...and now we have a concept of “preference” agreed to by Amtrak, Union Pacific, Norfolk Southern, and the U.S. Justice Dept., which will serve us well as a reference in any future on-time performance dispute. **In this instance, I’m really glad I was wrong.**

## Dispatches From Big Sky Country

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

The [Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority](#) hosted its annual conference this week in Livingston, Montana, where attendees took part in a conversation about how to restore passenger rail service to dozens of communities across the Western U.S.

The [Big Sky North Coast Corridor](#), stretching over 2,300 miles from the Great Lakes to the Pacific Northwest, will link 21 metropolitan areas, hundreds of smaller towns, and dozens of Tribal nations. Livingston is situated at the gateway to Yellowstone National Park, and—with its historic train depot and sweeping mountain views—serves as a reminder of the legacy passenger advocates are building upon, when trains were a foundational lifeline for every Western community.

As a panelist, I had the privilege of speaking alongside tribal leaders, transportation officials, economic experts, and community advocates from across the Greater Western U.S. Attendees heard messages of support from U.S. Senators Tim Sheehy (R-MT), Steve Daines (R-MT), and Roger Wicker (R-MS); as well as Representative Troy Downing (R-MT). Amtrak Board Member Elaine Clegg also addressed the conference, describing opportunities and challenges the railroad is facing as it works to improve and expand service across its network.

The theme, *Turning Our Stories into Action*, elicited stories of communities left behind by decades of disinvestment, of young people leaving rural towns for lack of opportunity, and of senior citizens struggling to access healthcare. But rather than focusing on the negative, these stories offered a blueprint for change. Attendees weren’t just speaking about the pleasures of train travel, they were discussing how to use transportation connections to create opportunity and sustain communities.

[\[TO CONTINUE READING ABOUT SEAN'S TRIP TO LIVINGSTON, CLICK HERE\]](#)

## A Pop-Up Transit System for a Pop-Up City

[by Jim Mathews / President & CEO](#)

Today, I’d like to use an aviation story to tell a transit story.

Every summer, the sleepy city of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, becomes quite literally the single busiest airport in the world. A little more than a month ago, more than 700,000 people – nearly 11 times the population of the city – converged on Wittman Regional Airport for the Experimental Aircraft Association’s [AirVenture fly-in and air show](#).

For a week, the airfield becomes a pop-up city, a small metropolis, with tens of thousands of people camping, showering, eating, and moving around the 2.3 square miles of the show grounds. I know, because I’m one of about 6,000 volunteers who help every year to put it together and keep it running.

Volunteers do everything from organizing First Aid to cleaning up the grounds, organizing aircraft parking, and even cool jobs like mine – I work in the control tower for the Warbirds area of the show.

**Here’s the transit part.** Another thing volunteers do is [operate a regular tram system](#). Five regular routes together move an astonishing 70,000 riders every single day, with roughly five- to seven-minute headways. And here’s the kicker: those trams are free. For one week each year, the tram system at AirVenture moves more people than the entire transit networks of small and mid-sized American cities. Without charging fares.

It’s easy to dismiss “free transit” as a nice-to-have perk, but in Oshkosh it’s much more than that. The trams are the circulatory system of the entire event. They carry visitors to food vendors, souvenir stands, aircraft displays, forums, workshops, movies, and concerts.

The Red and Yellow lines each run roughly north-south and come together at the show center from the northern end of the show grounds, a spot known as the “North 40.” The Yellow line is the shortest run, but it relieves a lot of congestion at the show center, where four exhibition buildings become very crowded with foot traffic.

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## Field Notes

### Calling All Readers!

Do you have a favorite transit/train photo (or photos) you have taken from your travels around the country, or even around the world? Would you like to see them featured in our Hotline social media post each week (with credit, of course)?

Send them to Joe Aiello @ [jaiello@narprail.org](mailto:jaiello@narprail.org) with the subject "HOTLINE PHOTO"

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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## 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!

### [SEPTA avoids cuts for another 2 years. Pa. agency grants request for SEPTA to use maintenance funds, WHY?](#)

While this is a temporary fix, SEPTA's service cuts will be reversed in full by the end of the weekend (Sept 14th).

### [Voices of passengers: Transit justice must include commuter rail, El Diario NY](#)

In an op-ed for El Diario, Queens resident Samuel Santaella shares a deeply personal account of how high commuter rail fares keep working-class New Yorkers from accessing faster, more reliable transit. Although he lives just minutes from a LIRR station, Samuel - like thousands of others - faces long and complicated commutes because fares are unaffordable.

### [Amtrak trains from Michigan to Chicago to stop service for 5 days, Detroit News](#)

No train service between Chicago and Pontiac or Port Huron from Sept. 15th to the 19th. Limited charter bus service will be available for select Amtrak Wolverine and Blue Water routes while the over-the-track coaling towers, which haven't been used in over 70 years, are taken down.

### [Amtrak adds car to Mardi Gras Service for Saints games after strong start, AL.com](#)

Amtrak's Mardi Gras service is already proving to be quite popular with the "Who Dat?" crowd on the Gulf Coast.

### [Hundreds of loads of sand delivered to shore up railway in San Clemente, Times of San Diego](#)

Over 300 trucks brought in 3,400 cubic yards of sand during an "important initial deposit" to help reinforce the San Clemente shoreline. By next summer, 540k cubic yards (or about 50k dump trucks worth) will be used for this \$310M restoration project.

### [Los Angeles Union Station Train Festival 2025: LA's Spirit in Motion!, Stay Happening](#)

LA Metro, Metrolink, Amtrak, and rail fans of all ages are getting together for a celebration on September 20th at Los Angeles Union Station.

### [NJ Transit makes it easy to get to MetLife Stadium this NFL season, WOBN](#)

NJ Transit has added direct access to Met Life this season for Giants & Jets fan (or fans of the opposing teams looking to celebrate an easy win)

### [Architect details progress on \\$6M Tampa train station revival, Business Observer](#)

Architect Jerel McCants is leading a powerful transformation of Tampa's Union Station - a \$6M restoration project that's not just about preserving



history, but confronting it.

### [MBTA launches extended late-night service with free rides, WCVB](#)

Starting last week weekend, all modes of public transit around "The Hub" will be free from 9pm til the end of service - while extending hours on the subway and select bus routes.



**WE ARE WORKING ON A DISCORD SERVER.  
STAY TUNED FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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.

## Upcoming Events

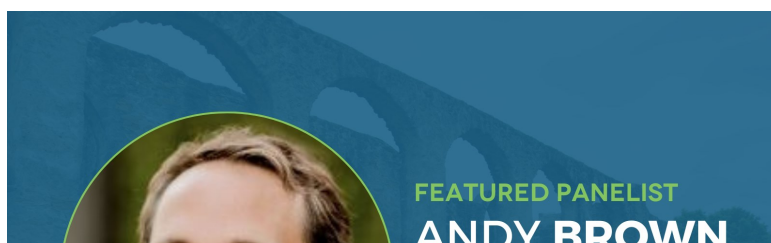
[RailNation: San Antonio](#), October 3-5

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!

### RailNation: San Antonio



**REGISTRATION ENDS MONDAY,  
SEPTEMBER 15TH AT MIDNIGHT EASTERN**



ANDY BROWN  
JUDGE, TRAVIS COUNTY (AUSTIN)



**RAILNATION:  
SAN ANTONIO**  
OCTOBER 3-5, 2025

RAIL PASSENGERS  
#RNSAS



**FEATURED SPEAKER**  
**CAROLINE MAYS**  
DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND  
MODAL PROGRAMS, TXDOT

**RAILNATION:  
SAN ANTONIO**  
OCTOBER 3-5, 2025

RAIL PASSENGERS  
#RNSAS

[Click Here for the RN:SAS Event Page](#)

## THANK YOU TO OUR EVENT SPONSORS

### CORPORATE/GROUPS



### INDIVIDUALS

BRUCE ASHTON  
TOM & CHRISTY COMPSON  
ROBERT FRAMPTON  
GARY MOLINE  
J.R. PRICE  
MICHAEL ROBINSON  
MILES SCHULZE

## 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**, had a few informal meetings in DC this week with corporate and labor allies, as well as preparing for the upcoming RailNation: San Antonio event from Oct 3-5, finalizing work on reauthorization proposals, and reviewing our positions on insurance reform, shared use of rights-of-way, and the role of the Surface Transportation Board in advance of next week's in-person Passenger Rail Advisory Committee meeting in STB's hearing room.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, spoke at the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority Annual Conference, and continued to work with Congressional offices and allied organizations to develop rail policy proposals for the upcoming surface transportation reauthorizing bill.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, processed membership dues and donations sent to the DC office and tended to the administrative/operations needs of the Association.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, continued to plan next month's meeting in San Antonio, held discussions with various stakeholders for potential locations for next fall, correspond with members of our volunteer leadership, and created graphics and content for our social media channels
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, processed a large number of lapsed memberships this week and was very pleased with the strong response to our recent reminder email to members whose accounts had expired. With so many renewals and inquiries coming in, she is working diligently to answer questions as quickly as possible and asks for patience as responses are returned. As a helpful reminder, if you are trying to log into the membership portal and don't remember your username, simply use the email address you signed up with and click "Forgot Password." A reset email will be sent to

## Keep Your Contact Info & Preferences Up to Date

We want to be sure you never miss important updates, membership news, or your transaction receipts! You can easily update your email address, phone number, mailing address, and communication preferences anytime through the CharityEngine Constituent Portal:

<https://membership.railpassengers.org/usercenter> (we recommend bookmarking this link for easy access)

### Getting Started

1. Visit the Login page and enter the User Name and Password associated with your CharityEngine account.

The login form consists of a title "Log in" at the top. Below it are two input fields: "User Name" with a person icon and "Password" with a lock icon. There is a "Remember me" checkbox with a checkmark and a "Forgot password?" link. At the bottom is a dark grey button labeled "LOG IN".

2. Once you're logged in, you'll see your account dashboard. Click "Update Your Info."

The dashboard has a top navigation bar with links: Home, My Info & Preferences, Reports & Tax Statements, Events, and Settings. The main content area shows a profile card for "Tom Train" with fields for Name, Email, Phone, and Address. To the right are four communication preference toggles: "Receive Email?", "Receive Phone Calls?", "Receive Mail?", and "Receive SMS?", all currently set to "YES". An "Update Your Info" link is below the address. Below the profile card is a "Welcome To Your Membership Dashboard" message and three buttons: "Renew Membership", "Donate", and "Board - Council Directory".

### Making Updates

On the Edit Contact Info screen, you can:

Update your personal details like email, phone, and address.

Adjust your communication preferences—switch the green "Yes" button to red "No" (or vice versa)

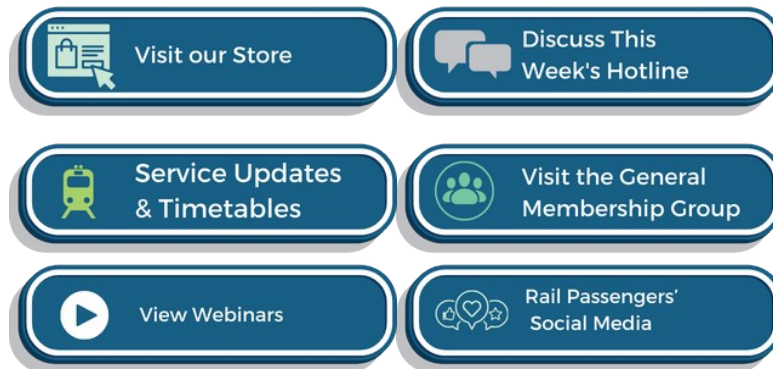
Click **UPDATE** to save your changes.

The "EDIT CONTACT INFO" form has a "Home" link at the top left. It contains input fields for "First Name" (Tom), "Middle", "Last Name" (Train), "DOB" (MM/DD/YYYY), "Email", "Phone" ((703) 555-5555), and "Address" (1200 G St Nw Washington DC 20005). There is a "COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES" section with a checked checkbox and four toggles: "Receive Email?", "Receive Phone Calls?", "Receive Mail?", and "Receive SMS?", all currently set to "YES". A "Enter Unit Number or Other Details" link is below the address field. At the bottom are "UPDATE" and "CANCEL" buttons.

### A Quick Tip

Since transaction receipts are sent by email, having your current email

## We Have Merch!



## Rail Passengers Timetables

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

**WE HAVE A FULL SUMMER UPDATE,  
INCLUDING THE NEW *MARDI GRAS* SERVICE**

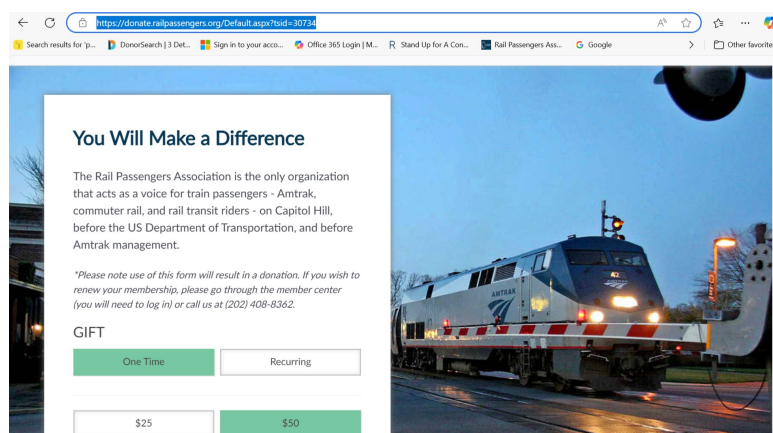
[CLICK HERE](#)

NOTE: Because we do update the links on our website - please bookmark **the main page** and not the individual schedules

## Donate Online with Confidence

You can donate to the Rail Passengers Association online with confidence, knowing your credit card information is secure. Charity Engine uses industry-standard SSL technology to keep your information secure. Don't wait for a paper appeal to donate, support the Association today by donating here. When the web browser shows a lock next to the URL, it means that it's an HTTPS, and it's secure:

<https://donate.railpassengers.org/Default.aspx?tsid=30734>





# 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

### Use Your Donor Advised Fund (DAF) to Donate, Renew or Join Online

You can now donate or join/renew your membership, online, through your donor advised fund using DAFpay. All Rail Passengers forms now include a "Donor Advised Fund" button under Payment.

#### Donation Form:

Phone Number (not required)  
Phone Number

Email Address  
\*Email Address

Yes, I would like to receive email communications.

PAYMENT

Credit Card  Bank Account  PayPal

Donor Advised Fund  Google Pay

DAF pay | Donor Advised Fund

Dedicate this donation?

#### Membership Form:

Rail Passengers' Webinar Series

Other

Yes, I prefer communication by email rather than by mail.

PAYMENT

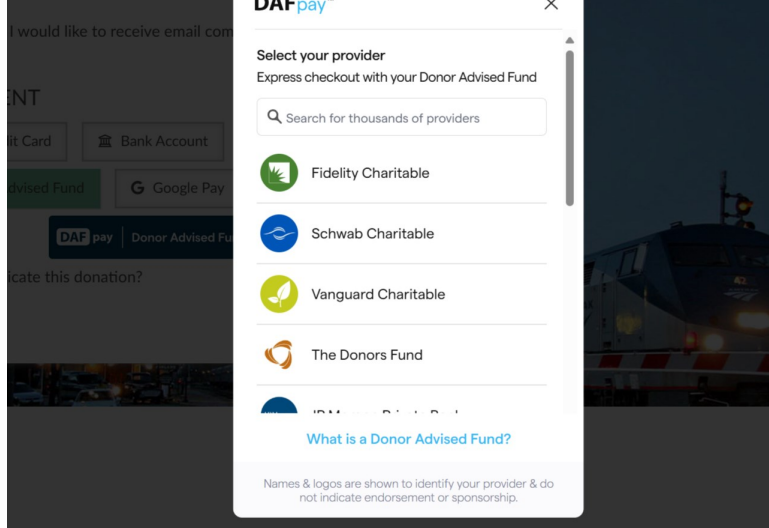
Credit Card  Bank Account  Donor Advised Fund  Google Pay

CAPTCHA

I'm not a robot

DAF pay | Donor Advised Fund

After selecting Donor Advised Fund as your payment preference, you will be taken to a DAFpay screen to select your donor advised fund provider, i.e., Fidelity Charitable, Vanguard Charitable, Daffy, etc.



Select your provider, then follow their prompts. If you need to provide information on Rail Passengers Association, please use the below:

National Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc.  
 dba Rail Passengers Association  
 1200 G Street, NW  
 Suite 520  
 Washington, DC 20005  
 Contact: Jonsie Stone, [jstone@narprail.org](mailto:jstone@narprail.org)  
 Tax ID: 36-2615221

## 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.

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:



**RAIL PASSENGERS**  
EST. 1967

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