

RAILPASSENGERS



WEEKLY HOTLINE

Issue #1,388–March 14, 2025

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

Congress Poised to Avoid Government Shutdown

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

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer has indicated there are sufficient numbers of Democrats willing to vote “yes” to pass cloture on a budget extension. This parliamentary procedure will allow the Senate to pass a Republican-led funding bill by a simple majority, avoiding a government shutdown that was set to go into effect at midnight.

The [Fiscal Year 2025 Continuing Resolution](#) (CR), scheduled to be taken up by the Senate later today, passed along party lines out of the Republican-controlled House earlier this week. The funding bill cuts \$13 billion in non-defense discretionary spending compared to FY2024 levels, while increasing defense spending by \$6 billion.

What Does this Mean for Passenger Trains?

The CR continues funding for Amtrak at existing levels, allowing the railroad to continue day-to-day operations, while also overseeing project management for construction and equipment procurement efforts funded by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA).

The cuts to transportation are largely achieved by jettisoning Congressionally Directed Spending earmarks. That includes \$75 million in Senate-sponsored projects funded through the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Grant program. These earmarks mostly benefitted short-line freight rail projects, with some [exceptions](#):

- Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ) - \$3.85 million for the City of Flagstaff for improvements to the Flagstaff Amtrak Station platform;

- Sen. Alex Padilla (D-AZ) - \$2.9 million for the San Joaquin Regional Rail Commission for PTC installation work that will allow for expanded ACE rail service; and

- Sen. Gary Peters (D-MI) - \$2 million for the City of Detroit for improvements to the Michigan Central Intermodal Passenger Station.

Potential notes of concern:

- The bill does **not** include language Democrats lobbied for that would've stipulated the Trump Administration must comply with Congressional directives over programmatic spending. This preserves the current stalemate between Congress and the White House, creating a potential exposure for previously appropriated passenger rail funds. In turn, that may be bad for a variety of projects that have already secured grants, but the

State has yet to receive the money from the U.S. Department of Transportation.

- The FY25 CR failed to include pro forma language allowing the District of Columbia's government to spend local tax revenue. This omission would mean the DC City Council will need to cut \$1.1 billion from its budget, mid-year, resulting in cuts to police, fire services, public schools, charter schools, transit, and other public services. Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) would face a surprise \$200 million cut to a pre-approved budget, with the agency warning of layoffs and service cuts. It's not clear if Congress is willing to pass a legislative fix that would allow DC to spend its own taxpayers dollars to restore these services, with House Appropriations Chair Tom Cole (R-OK) telling reporters "I'm sorry if everything wasn't perfect, and I'm sorry the Democrats weren't on the table to talk to us, but it just is what it is."

Privatization Fails Rail

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

Elon Musk's recent musings about privatizing Amtrak set off an avalanche of social-media comments and widespread press coverage, and it also has emboldened some of the traditional boosters for Amtrak privatization to dust off their arguments and try again.

The trouble is, the arguments are as unpersuasive now as they have been every other time they've been advanced. Privatization advocates refuse to look evidence in the face that privatization fails most of the time. It fails railroads, it fails passengers, it fails governments, and it fails communities.

Musk is not the only person to observe that right now Amtrak service is not reliable enough, not comfortable enough, and not affordable enough. But the idea that privatizing Amtrak would solve any of those issues betrays how little he and other privatization boosters know about why Amtrak exists in the first place.

Just look at the actual experience: passenger-rail privatization enjoys a record unblemished by success.

In the 1990s, British politicians trotted out privatization as the panacea and came up with a model that is nearly identical to what some American leaders are proposing today: a nationalized infrastructure system, with franchisees awarded licenses to operate routes independently of one another. Privateers insisted that service would improve, and that government subsidies would go down, although even the most optimistic boosters acknowledged that fares would go up. Those boosters tried to paint this as a feature, not a bug, arguing that it was only fair that passengers should share more of the burden for operating the trains on which they ride.

Then, 26 years later, leaders in the Conservative Party – the same ones who crowed the loudest about the benefits of privatization – ended franchising trains. After accounting for inflation, the British government was paying more than two and a half times the subsidy they had been paying under the old model. The number of trains operated went up, but so did the fares. Service quality deteriorated, and in some instances companies that won franchises wound up walking away from their contracts – not unlike what happened in 2015 when Indiana kicked Amtrak off the Hoosier State and tried to get a private operator instead. And now there's no Hoosier State.

[Click Here to Keep Reading](#)

Confidential Reporting: FRA Pulls The Plug

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

This week, we all took a big step backwards for rail safety.

Declaring that all sides were at an "impasse," the Federal Railroad Administration decided to disband its working group on [Confidential Close Call Reporting Systems, or C3RS](#). I was a member of that working group.

C3RS provides a mechanism for operating employees to report unsafe conditions or incidents – "close calls" – without fear of retribution so that safety data trends can be identified and commonalities can be addressed before a serious incident occurs.

"FRA appreciates the hard work and collaboration that occurred within the Working Group, but has concluded that the group has reached an impasse, and further meetings will not likely produce meaningful results," the agency told all of us yesterday. "Accordingly, deactivating this Working Group will allow FRA and the RSAC to prioritize new efforts to advance safety in our industry. We thank the Working Group members for their input and dedication."

The FRA's statement was true as far as it went. But by declaring an

impasse, it diplomatically avoided identifying the **cause** of that impasse: railroad management did not want to give up its philosophy of "Punish First. Ask Questions Later."

One of my colleagues on the working group responded quickly yesterday, and I think their response deserves more attention.

"The failure of the RSAC Confidential Close Call Reporting (C3RS) Working Group to reach an agreement is both unacceptable and a glaring example of the systemic obstacles preventing real progress on rail safety," my Working Group colleague wrote. "FRA's decision to withdraw Task Number 2022-03 and deactivate the group is a direct result of an unwillingness by some in the industry to embrace a meaningful, non-punitive safety culture. This is a failure that puts workers and the public at risk."

I won't identify this person or their organization, only because I'm sure that neither this person nor their organization was prepared for this to be a public statement.

The confidential-reporting, safety-first philosophy, under a different acronym, has yielded extraordinary leaps in commercial aviation safety over the past half century, and that's still true despite a string of recent fatal crashes. As my colleague notes, "C3RS is a proven tool for identifying and mitigating risks before they result in injuries or fatalities. Yet, despite nearly two years of meetings and discussions, resistance from certain stakeholders has once again derailed an initiative that could have saved lives. The refusal to implement a comprehensive, industry-wide C3RS program is a clear indication that some would rather protect corporate liability than protect workers."

[For More From Jim, Please Click Here](#)

Board & MARC Election

Every year, we give interested Rail Passengers Association members the opportunity to deepen their involvement in the Association's work by serving on the Board of Directors or the Membership Action Review Committee (MARC). **We are now accepting candidates wishing to be elected to the Board of Directors as a Director for a three-year term ending with the Business meeting in 2028.** Current Non-Board Council members may also apply to serve a one-year term on the MARC ending with the Business Meeting in 2026.

The application submission deadline is 11:59 PM Eastern time on Friday, March 21, 2025.

While floor nominations will be accepted, being approved before the business meeting allows members of the Council to know of your intent in advance.

Any RPA/NARP member who meets the qualifications may apply to one of the two Director seats that are up for election this year, and any current Non-Board Council of Representatives member may apply to one of the five seats on the Council's Membership Action Review Committee. Before applying, it is highly recommended that you review these position responsibilities and qualifications:

[Position Description for Board Director](#)

[Position Description for MARC Member](#)

Please note that current Directors or MARC Members whose terms are expiring in 2025 must also submit a Candidate Information Statement by the March 21 deadline in order to be listed on the ballots to be distributed to the Council Members. If you are currently serving on the MARC and this is your third consecutive one-year term of service, you may not apply for re-election at this time.

If you are interested in applying for a Director seat: [CLICK HERE](#)

If you are interested in applying for a MARC Member seat: [CLICK HERE](#)

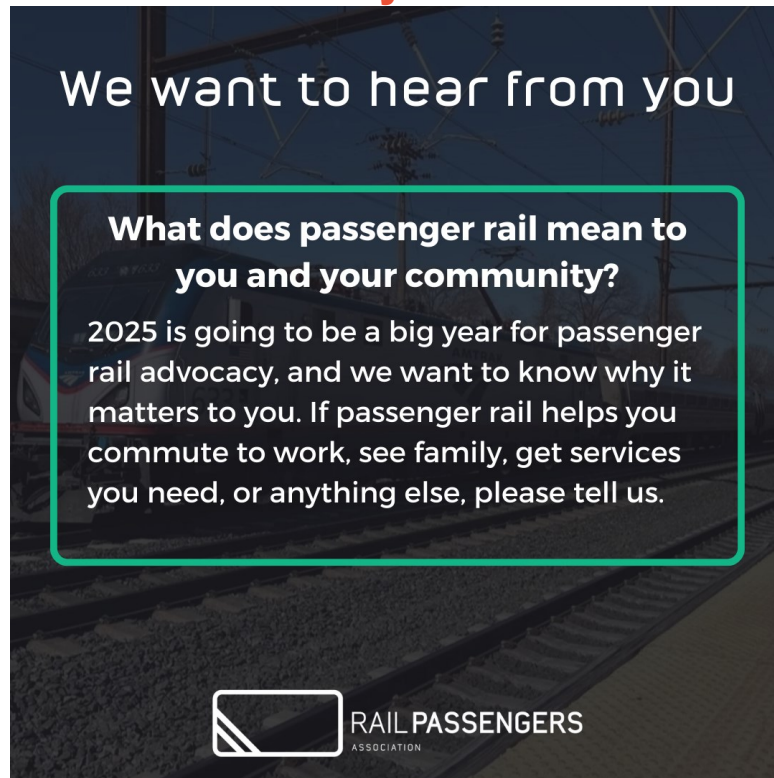
The CIS submission deadline is Friday, March 21, 2025, at 11:59 PM Eastern time. The election will take place virtually starting Saturday, March 29, 2025, and lasting through Friday, April 4, 2025.

Please contact Steven H. Musen by email at musensth@cox.net if you have questions or would like to know more about serving on the Board or the MARC.

Thanks for all you do to bring about a more connected America!

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


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

LAST DAY!



RAILNATION: DC 2025

**Regional Summits
& Day on the Hill**

March 24th - April 3rd, 2025

Rail Passengers Office & Conference Room



Supported By



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.



(Click the links below to view the agenda for each region)

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 if you have any further questions.

YOU MUST REGISTER ONLINE BY MIDNIGHT TONIGHT (3/14). DUE TO BUILDING SECURITY, THERE WILL BE NO DAY-OF REGISTRATIONS.

[REGISTER HERE!](#)

Registration ends at midnight eastern on March 14th, 2025

Council Business Meeting

Saturday, March 29th, 10:30am-5pm.

Price: \$75 for in-person

** Lunch is included*

** Free for those who will be streaming online*

Location: [Open Gov Hub](#)

1100 13th St NW, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20005

[Additional Info](#)

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

Deadline to register is Friday, March 14th at Midnight eastern. Due to building security, we are not allowed to have "walk-ups" for this event - so you MUST register by 3/14.

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!

- [Greater Boston must reclaim its transit leadership](#), CommonWealth Beacon

TransitMatters' Jarred Johnson lays out the challenge to The Hub, the birthplace of the subway in America - reclaim its history as one of the world's leaders in public transportation and truly revolutionize connectivity in the Greater Boston region.

- [Eleanor Acheson: A champion of diversity at Amtrak and beyond](#), Progressive Railroadng

A lifelong diversity advocate, and recently retired after an 18-year career at Amtrak, Eleanor "Eldie" Acheson was named the 2024 Railway Woman of the Year from the League of Railway Women at a conference held in Florida last month.

- [Amtrak and Rexmark Announce Resolution of Legal Claims for](#)

The drawn out drama over the Washington Union Station lease agreement has found a conclusion as a US District Court judge has closed the case now that both Amtrak & Rexmark have come to terms.

- [Southwest Airlines checked bag policy change lampooned by Amtrak, NBC Chicago](#)

And the cheese stands alone...

- [Trump taps former Pa. GOP chair to serve on Amtrak board of directors, Pennsylvania Capital-Star](#)

President Trump has put former Pennsylvania GOP Chair, and Western PA rail advocate, Rob Gleason's name forward to become a member of Amtrak's Board.

- [Tri-Rail ridership climbs, funding concerns loom, CBS Miami](#)

With COVID-19 relief money running out and rising operation costs, South Florida's Tri-Rail is in search of new funding sources - just as ridership continues to be on the rise over the last decade.

- [Metra asks STB to require Union Pacific to continue to allow commuter operations, Trains](#)

The seemingly never-ending drama of UP trying to get out of the commuter rail business in Chicago keeping rolling along - this time with Metra going to the Surface Transportation Board in order to save service "in jeopardy".

- [Metra considers changing the names of all its lines, asks public to weigh in, WGN-TV](#)

With Union Pacific soon to exit the passenger rail game, Chicagoland's commuter service is thinking about a name change - but not just the three currently running with the UP moniker, and they are seeking public input.

- [Detroit's 'Bring Back the Tracks' campaign pushes for rail transit revival along Michigan Avenue, Click on Detroit](#)

Local activists are pushing for more transit options in the Motor City, and reaching deep into the city's storied past for future ideas.

- [Tired of subway delays? The MTA wants to fix that by strapping Google smartphones to New York trains, CNN Business](#)

Last September, the NY's 120-year-old MTA launched a pilot with Google Public Sector, using Pixel phones in subway cars to analyze track defects - recording 38,858 total delays in the first month alone.

- [CT representatives push for expanding commuter rail lines to New Milford: 'Makes so much sense', CT Insider](#)

If Connecticut State Representative Bill Buckbee has his way, New Milford, CT could see passenger trains for the first time in 50 years.

- [Group wants to move Madison Square Garden across street from Penn Station in redesign proposal, ABC7 New York](#)

A group of advocates, joined by architect and former NYC Chief Urban Designer Alex Washburn, have come up with a \$7.5B grand design to deal with the ongoing issue with the need to rethink Penn Station.

- [Transit News: NJ Portal Bridge to Finish in 2026, New Jersey Digest](#)

The replacement for the original 114-year-old bridge is nearing completion. Check out the article that includes an update video from NJ Transit

- [Amtrak Trains Undergo Design Overhaul, Railway News](#)

A new color-coded, wayfinding paint scheme is coming to a train near you to help passengers have an easier time finding the car they are supposed to be on when they travel.



[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.

Upcoming Events

- [RailNation: DC 2025](#)
March 24–April 3
- [WisARP Spring 2025 General Membership Meeting](#)
Saturday, April 5, 9:00a
- [2025 ESPA \(& Rail Passengers Association\) Annual Passenger Rail Advocates Meeting & Lunch](#)
Saturday, April 5, 11:00a
- [21st Annual Southwestern Rail Conference](#)
April 7–8

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**, spoke at the Southeast Rail Forum in Raleigh, sharing details on the role of the Surface Transportation Board's newly formed Passenger Rail Advisory Committee, alongside other PRAC members, in advancing passenger rail programs and defending them against baseless attacks. He also met with several state DOT representatives, who highlighted concerns about delays to many major and important rail projects because capital funds for them, despite court orders, remain frozen.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, is focused on finalizing materials and meeting schedules for RailNationDC's regional advocacy summits.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, processed membership dues and donations sent to the DC office, worked with our accounting partners to close financials for December/2024 as well as January and February 2025. Tending to the administrative and operational needs of the Association was also a focus.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, worked with fellow staff on finalizing aspects of the upcoming regional workshops and assisted a number of attendees with making their Hill visit appointments.
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, continues to work with our current membership as well as our new members to adjust to our new CharityEngine member portal. If you held a membership thru our NEON CRM at anytime prior to the transition to our new portal, your NEON ID will still work when you enter it into Amtrak for the discount. All members now have a new seven-digit number in our CharityEngine CRM. Please remember to only enter the first six digits when entering the number for any Amtrak discount.
- **Lili Leonard, Development Assistant**, is pleased to announce that we will soon launch our new 2025 Corporate Partner Levels. We understand that businesses and organizations in the rail industry vary widely in size and scope, and have refined our corporate offerings accordingly to be based on the business' annual operating revenues. Partnerships range from \$1,000 to \$10,000 and will support the great work we do while providing a valuable resource to rail industry businesses. Please email me if you would like more information! LLeonard@narprail.org

Starting **Wednesday, February 19th**, all membership, donation, and event registration transactions are being processed through **CharityEngine**. **Neon** is no longer the Association's CRM of record.

If you have the **Neon User Center** bookmarked, please update it to: <https://membership.railpassengers.org/usercenter>.

Your **Neon username and Account ID** have already been transferred to CharityEngine. However, because your **password was unique to Neon**, you will need to reset it when logging in for the first time.

Below is a screenshot of the **CharityEngine Constituent Portal** for reference.

Log in

Remember me [Forgot password?](#)

LOG IN

Over the coming weeks and months, we will continue to enhance the system. If you have any questions or need assistance, please please [email Kimberly A. Notarianni](mailto:Kimberly.A.Notarianni)

As with any upgrade, there may be minor hiccups. Your Association staff is here to help and if necessary, work with CharityEngine to gain the answers. We are excited by the full complement of options and benefits that will be available to our supporters through one system.

Thank you for your patience and cooperation.



Rail Passengers Webinars

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



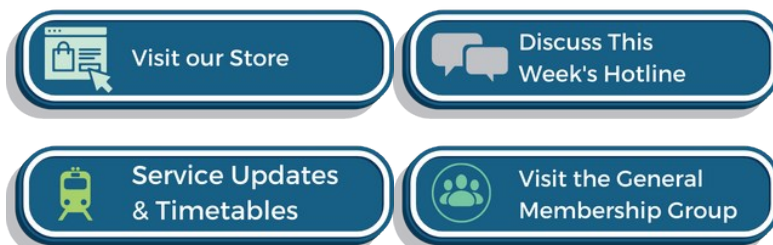
We Have Merch!

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,

****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

HUGE Spring Update from 3/6/2025

Nearly every in-house schedule has been updated and posted.

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.

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 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](#).

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:



RAIL PASSENGERS

EST. 1967

Rail Passengers Association
1200 G St. NW
Suite 520
Washington, DC 20005

P 202.408.8362
F 202.408.8287

www.railpassengers.org