

# RAILPASSENGERS



## WEEKLY HOTLINE

Issue #1,399—June 20, 2025



Take Action

### Association News

#### Rail Industry Targets Permitting Reform, Guaranteed Funding

*By Sean Jeans-Gail | VP of Gov't Affairs + Policy*

Senate transportation leaders convened a panel of rail industry leaders in Washington this week to discuss policy goals for the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization. Industry voices focused on streamlining federal environmental permitting processes, predictable funding, and a flexible regulatory framework that would allow railroads to use technology for safety activities traditionally performed by workers.

Senator Todd Young (R-Ind.), Chair of the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Surface Transportation, Freight, Pipelines, and Safety, led the hearing, titled [“On the Right Track: Modernizing America’s Rail.”](#) The panel included Ian Jefferies, CEO of the Association of American Railroads; Peter Gilbertson of Anacostia Rail Holdings, on behalf of the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association; Brightline senior advisor Husein Cumber; and Clarence Anthony, CEO of the National League of Cities. Amtrak was notable for its continued absence; the railroad, which is the biggest intercity carrier in the U.S. and the recipient of a plurality of rail funds from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), hasn’t appeared before Congress since [the ouster of former CEO Stephen Gardner](#).

Generally, Senate Republicans focused on the freight side of the rail industry. However, some members did express interest in finding ways to increase private sector involvement in passenger rail operations in the U.S.

“Railroads are essential to moving goods across this country, especially the agricultural and energy products we rely on daily,” said Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX), chair of the full committee, in a prepared statement. “There is also increasing interest in developing intercity passenger rail. We have a lot to look forward to with innovative companies like Brightline expanding the options available for passenger rail, and exciting technological advances in the freight rail industry. Whether it’s transporting people or goods, railroads must keep innovating to provide safer, more efficient service.”

[\[TO READ MORE FROM SEAN ON THE COMMITTEE HEARING: INCLUDING FUNDING LEVELS, PERMITTING REFORM, AND DEFENDING AMTRAK’S EXISTENCE - CLICK HERE\]](#)

#### A Lament For Clean Trains

*By Jim Mathews / President & CEO*

I got some really great news this week from my regular recurring meeting with Amtrak’s customer-experience leadership – the wash rack in Chicago has just been brought back up and running, which means we’ll start to see a lot more clean windows as the busy summer travel season kicks into high gear.

A recent trip on the Floridian out of Orlando headed north just underscored how great it will be to resume cleaning trains again in Chicago. Take a look

at this picture of a “view” from a Floridian Viewliner snapped only three weeks ago.



[Last July, Amtrak told us that a capital program to replace all the wash racks had been deemed too expensive](#), so the Mechanical forces had to fall back on a Plan B built around a mix of replacement wash racks and targeted repairs for other wash racks, plus a temporary workaround of having workers manually squeegee cars at certain stations.

It seems they actually wound up falling back further to a Plan C, because it turns out that rules from the Environmental Protection Administration stopped the squeegee plan cold – there was no good way to collect the gunk squeegeed off the railcars. And the rest of Plan B, which would have wash racks going into service later that summer and fall, also seemed to take a lot longer than expected. So yes, this is later than promised and planned.

**Still, I'll take the win and be pleased we'll finally start looking out clean(er) windows.**

[\[FOR MORE FROM JIM, PLEASE CLICK HERE\]](#)

## Why Is DC Sabotaging Our Most Ambitious Infrastructure Project?

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

Just eight months ago, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) gave California's high-speed rail project a clean bill of health.

Now, in a stunning about-face, the same agency wants to tear up its funding agreements and walk away — claiming the very same facts they reviewed last Fall now somehow amount to failure.

This isn't oversight. It's sabotage.

Let's be clear: the FRA's sudden claim that California has failed to comply with Federal high-speed rail agreements is not based on new information, new risks, or new facts. [It's based on a new Administration in Washington](#), and the old political playbook that too often treats public infrastructure — especially bold projects like high-speed rail — as partisan footballs to be spiked or deflated depending on who's in charge.

That kind of political whiplash is exactly why [our nation lags behind the rest of the developed world](#) in building modern transportation. And this time, it threatens to derail one of the most transformative infrastructure projects in American history.

California's high-speed rail line, now under active construction across the Central Valley, has already generated more than \$22 billion in economic activity and created over 15,000 good-paying jobs, generating \$1.69 in returns on every program dollar invested even before the very first passenger rides the train.

Trains will connect the economically disadvantaged heart of the state— places like Fresno, Kings, and Tulare Counties—to hubs of opportunity. And the project is being built to world-class standards, with 220-mph trains on dedicated, electrified tracks. This isn't an Amtrak upgrade. It's America's first true high-speed rail system.

So why is the FRA suddenly trying to kill it?

[Their June 4 report reads less like a regulatory assessment and more like an opposition white paper.](#) It cherry-picks old data,

misrepresents the conclusions of independent oversight bodies, and pretends that major legislative advances — like Governor Newsom's budget proposal to guarantee \$1 billion in annual Cap-and-Invest revenue — don't even exist.

Worse, it recycles debunked talking points about ridership and funding gaps, ignoring the very same documents the FRA reviewed when it approved these agreements last year. If California's business plan, schedule, or funding model were so flawed, why did FRA agree to them in the first place?

The truth is that this isn't about compliance. It's about politics.

[\[CLICK HERE TO CONTINUE READING\]](#)

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## Field Notes

### ACTION ALERT: SAVE THE FLYER



**RAIL PASSENGERS**

**SAVE THE HEARTLAND FLYER**

**ACTION ALERT!**

Since the Texas state legislature failed to secure the necessary funding to support operations for the Heartland Flyer passenger rail service, the train is in jeopardy of shutting down on October 1st. This will lead to the loss of jobs, opportunities, accessibility, and an estimated \$23.7M in economic benefits for Texas and Oklahoma. It will also mean the end to future expansion into Kansas.

We must fight back and deliver our message to the Governor's office: **SAVE THE HEARTLAND FLYER!**

[WWW.RAILPASSENGERS.ORG/SAVETHEFLYER](http://WWW.RAILPASSENGERS.ORG/SAVETHEFLYER)

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD!

## Global Passenger Rail Roundup

*By Philip Mayer, Association Volunteer*

### Bicentennial of Locomotives Celebrated Around the World

In Northeast England in September 1825, the Stockton and Darlington Railway (S&DR) opened service on the very first steam powered locomotive rail line. The 200th anniversary of this event is being celebrated by various transportation organizations around the world. The International Association of Public Transport, or UITP from the French name *Union Internationale des Transports Publics*, is commemorating the anniversary from their summit in Hamburg, Germany.

Celebrations are also ongoing in Northeastern England. The anniversary is being featured in exhibitions at the North Road Station Museum in Darlington in a currently active 1842 train station. Also at Hopetown Museum is Wagon Woods, a pay-per-child railway-themed adventure play park. The region is expected to receive 250,000 locomotive related tourists this year.

### Russia and North Korea Expand Rail Connections

Passenger rail service between the Russian and North Korean capital cities of Moscow and Pyongyang have resumed after being suspended since February 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Russian Ministry of Transport announced that the twice monthly service resumed on June 18, 2025.

The journey takes 8 days to cross the 6,200 miles and is the world's longest passenger rail route. The service uses North Korean train compartments.

On June 19, 2025, a monthly passenger train service starting in Pyongyang and going through China to Khabarovsk, a city in Russia's Far East, began service. In December 2024, limited rail connections were restored between Tumen, North Korea, and Khasan, a city in Russia's Far East, setting the stage for the full resumption of the Pyongyang-Moscow line.

WMATA, (Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority) is, as of June 15, 2025, running on Automatic Train Operation (ATO) across all lines on its system. When WMATA began metro service in 1976, it actually operated on ATO, but the system has not operated fully on ATO since a deadly accident in 2009.

Train operators will still be in every WMATA train. ATO allows train operators more time to focus on track and platform conditions and to monitor passengers entering and exiting the train.

ATO allows trains to travel at higher speeds, up to 75 miles per hour. End-to-end travel times on most lines will decrease by up to 3 minutes. The red line, which has had ATO since December 2024, has seen reduced end-to-end travel times of 8 minutes.

ATO is not used during inclement weather, single tracking, and when workers are on the tracks.

**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!

### [Amtrak Shares Plans for 'Extreme Heat' on US Trains](#), **Newsweek**

The National Weather Service has alerts of extreme heat watches and "dangerously hot conditions" in parts of 21 states starting this weekend. If you need to travel, please be aware of delays and speed restrictions.

Most importantly, if you live in an area affected by these alerts - please be careful and stay inside & hydrated when possible.

### [Public transit agencies begin planning for 'doomsday' funding scenario](#), **NPR Illinois**

Public transit agencies in Chicagoland are bracing for a \$771 million budget shortfall as federal COVID relief funds dry up by 2026. With no new funding plan passed by the May 31 deadline, the RTA is preparing for catastrophic service cuts and layoffs.

CTA, Metra, and Pace are now drafting two budgets—one with funding, and one without. Without action, riders could see up to 20% service reductions.

"We are in the 'or else' phase," said RTA board member Tom Kotarac.

### [Metra receives funding for two station projects, three locomotives](#), **Trains**

Metra has secured over \$104 million in funding for major upgrades, which includes money for station improvements and \$23.7M to purchase 3 new electric switching locomotives.

### [A SEPTA funding boost is uncertain amid a complex state budget struggle](#), **Billy Penn**

While transit advocates continue to push SEPTA funding issues to the forefront of the "worst budget fight in decades", many of the same old party line & rural/urban arguments are coming to light.

### [Shore Line East gets \\$4M boost in CT budget. But is that enough?](#), **CT Mirror**

Connecticut's new state budget includes \$12.1 million to keep Shore Line East rail service running through June 2026, but the future beyond next year remains uncertain.



**[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

## Fall Meeting Update!



**Join Us Oct 2-5 In San Antonio!**

*By Rail Passengers Staff*

**It's official!** The hotel contract is now signed, so we'll be staging our RailNation: San Antonio fall conference at the beautiful and newly renovated Holiday Inn San Antonio Riverwalk from October 2nd through October 5th. Our contacts at the hotel have prepared an online booking link just for our attendees, to make sure you get our special rate. **That booking link is live, so please use that link to make your reservations.**

This is the link to use: [Rail Passenger Association](#). Booking using this link does two things: it locks in the special rate for RailNation attendees, and it makes sure that the Association can cover the costs of the conference. Booking off-site is always your choice, but it makes it harder for us to offer an affordable conference for everyone.

Alongside our Texas-area Council members, we're working on finalizing the speaker list in the next few weeks, but we're also planning extra informative hands-on sessions on how to work for trains where you live, work, or study, and even some fun field trips and social events.

Of course, we'll also be sure to get authoritative speakers on things like the fleet upgrades, the status of the Heartland Flyer and Sunset Limited, and the outlook for Federal and state funding.

As always, this is a meeting open to the general public. It is **NOT** only for Council members, and it is **NOT** only for Rail Passengers Association members. It is for anyone who wants to see more and better trains and public transportation to more places for more people. If you're reading this...**THAT MEANS YOU!**

Please keep checking [railpassengers.org/RNSAS](http://railpassengers.org/RNSAS) for all the latest info. We'll put it there first, and you can save yourself having to email us for an answer!

[RN:SAS Event Page](#)

**Please contact Joe Aiello ([jaiello@narprrail.org](mailto:jaiello@narprrail.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**, split his time between Association business and following up on items from a Senate hearing this week beginning to set the outlines for what comes next after the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law/Investment in Infrastructure and Jobs Act. He took part early in the week in his regularly scheduled meeting with Amtrak customer-experience leadership, with topics ranging from clean trains to long-distance fleet replacements and the balance between fares and value.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, prepared and tracked the Senate Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Surface Transportation, Freight, Pipelines, and Safety hearing: "[On the Right Track: Modernizing America's Rail](#)". He also heard from transportation safety officials about ongoing safety oversight, while continuing to work with other stakeholders on surface transportation proposals.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, worked with our auditors on the FY2024 audit, began closing April and May financials, processed membership dues and donations sent to the DC office, and tended to the administrative/operational needs of the Association. She also collaborated with the Interns as they tackle their summer projects.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, has been slowing ramping up his work schedule post-surgery. Thank you to everyone who emailed their well-wishes over the last few weeks.

- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, continues to provide dedicated support to our constituents with all aspects of membership. Whether you're signing up for the first time, renewing your membership, adding eligible family members, or updating your CharityEngine portal access, she is here to help. For those who prefer personal assistance, she is happy to process renewals by credit card over the phone. Memberships can also be renewed by mail—just be sure to clearly note that your payment is for membership. Please remember, any mailed payments that are not specifically labeled will be processed as donations.

- **Lili Leonard, Development Assistant**, transitioned Community Partner program outreach to our amazing Interns team!

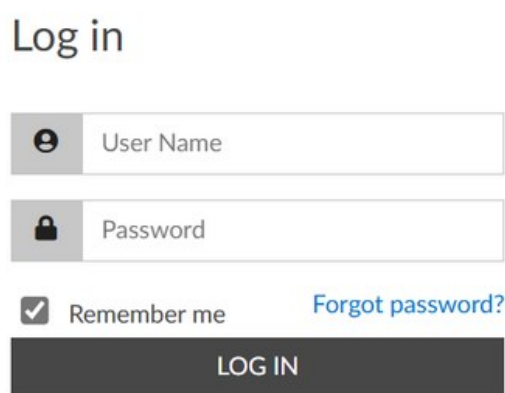
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Starting **Wednesday, February 19th**, all membership, donation, and event registration transactions are being processed through **CharityEngine**. **Neon** is no longer the Association's CRM of record.

?? 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.



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

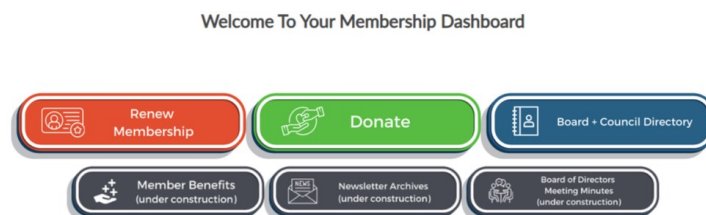
As with any upgrade, there may be minor hiccups. Your Association staff is here to help and if necessary, work with CharityEngine to gain the answers. We are excited by the full complement of options and benefits that will be available to our supporters through one system.

Thank you for your patience and cooperation.

### ?? New Dashboard Update in Your Constituent Portal!

When you access your constituent portal this week, you'll notice an exciting update to your **dashboard**!

We've added **new buttons** to make navigating your membership tools even easier:



Please note that some of the links are still under construction as we continue transitioning to our new software platform, **CharityEngine**.

### ?? Membership Renewals:

If you receive a renewal email, you can now access your renewal form directly through your dashboard or by clicking the link in the email.

### ?? Important Note for RENEWAL on Membership Display

The steps you take to **renew your membership** now mimic the “join” process. Don't be alarmed—your historical membership data from NEON has been successfully transferred to **CharityEngine**. The current renewal

process is designed to help you **verify your contact information, Amtrak Guest Rewards preference, and communication settings.**

?? If your NEON membership was set to **auto-renew**, your membership will continue to auto-renew in CharityEngine as well. We encourage all members to **log in and review your account** to ensure everything looks correct.

You will be issued a **new RPA member number** through CharityEngine, but your original number is still valid. You're welcome to use **either number** when purchasing Amtrak tickets.

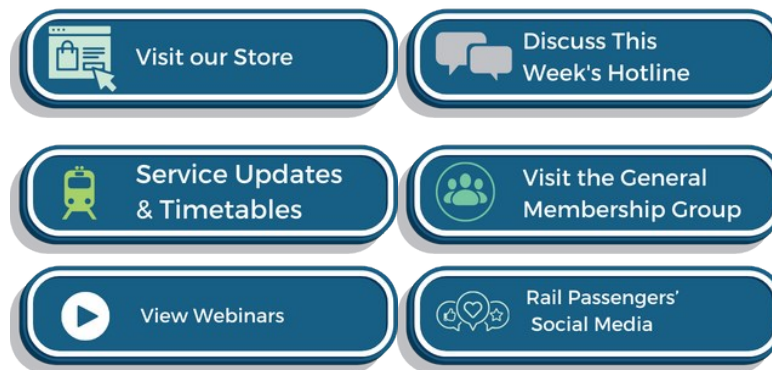
#### ?? About Your New Member Number:

Your new membership number will contain **seven digits**.

?? **Only use the first SIX digits** if you're using your new CharityEngine number when prompted during an Amtrak ticket purchase. Amtrak hasn't updated their system yet to recognize the full 7-digit number.

?? Thank you for your patience as we continue working to enhance your member experience. We're committed to making the new portal smooth, intuitive, and reliable!

## We Have Merch!



## Rail Passengers Timetables

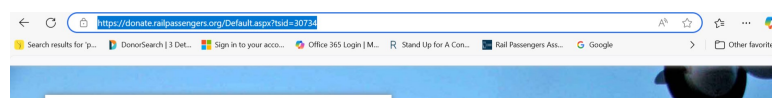
Thanks to a collaborative effort between Rail Passengers NYS Council Member Nathanael Nerode & [juckins.net](http://juckins.net)'s Chris Juckins, we have been able to completely update our timetables resource page.

[CLICK HERE](#)

## 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>



### You Will Make a Difference

The Rail Passengers Association is the only organization that acts as a voice for train passengers - Amtrak, commuter rail, and rail transit riders - on Capitol Hill, before the US Department of Transportation, and before Amtrak management.

*\*Please note use of this form will result in a donation. If you wish to renew your membership, please go through the member center (you will need to log in) or call us at (202) 408-8362.*


#### GIFT

One Time

Recurring

\$25

\$50





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

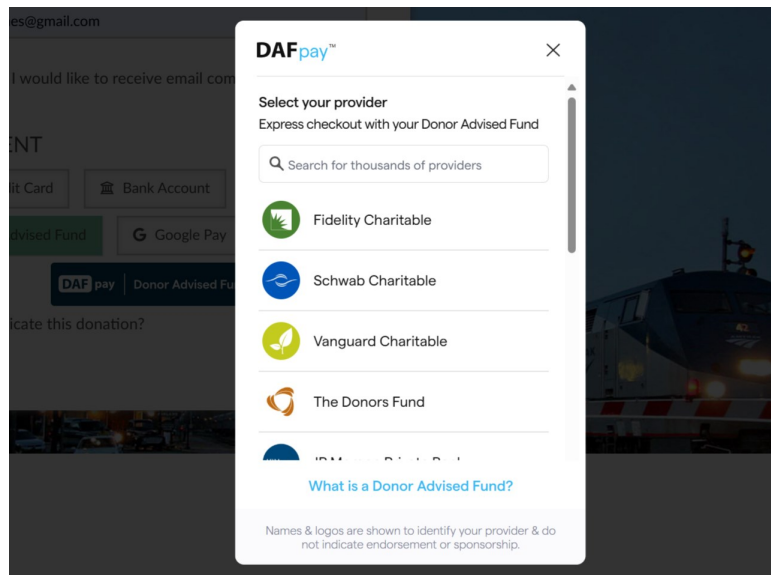
Donor Advised Fund

Google Pay

CAPTCHA



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

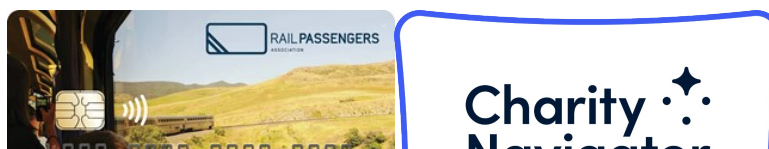


Select your provider, then follow their prompts. If you need to provide information on Rail Passengers Association, please use the below:

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  
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.

## Navigator

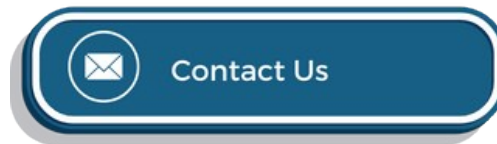


✦ **FOUR-STAR** ✦

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](#).

**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

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