

# RAILPASSENGERS



## WEEKLY HOTLINE

Issue #1,380—January 17, 2025

**NOTICE: The Rail Passengers office will be closed Monday, January 20th for both the Inauguration and in remembrance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day**

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!



[Take our Survey](#)

## Association News

### Key Senate Transportation Committee Emphasizes Importance of Amtrak and Passenger Rail to Trump Transportation Nominee

*[By Sean Jeans-Gail, VP of Gov't Affairs + Policy](#)*

The Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation held a hearing this week to consider Sean Duffy, President-elect Donald Trump's nomination for Secretary of Transportation. During the hearing, several Senators—from both parties, representing both Northeast Corridor (NEC) and National Network (NN) communities—emphasized the essential role Amtrak plays for millions of Americans. Mr. Duffy acknowledged the Committee's commitment to keeping these essential services running, and promised to work with Members to implement any passenger rail legislation Congress sees fit to enact.

In the wake of his nomination, *Rail Passengers* [highlighted Mr. Duffy's anti-Amtrak voting record](#) during his tenure representing Wisconsin's 7th Congressional District. Our staff worked to educate Committee members on this voting record, while making the case that it ought to be addressed in advance of Mr. Duffy's confirmation. Happily, several Senators used their

limited time to talk about the importance of Amtrak and passenger rail to their constituents, giving Mr. Duffy an opportunity to commit publicly to working with Congress to advance upgrades to the U.S. rail network.

Senator Andy Kim (D-NJ) of New Jersey took the most direct line in his questioning, asking Mr. Duffy to explain his position on passenger rail in light of his voting record on Amtrak. Mr. Duffy responded that he was representing a district in northern Wisconsin that did not have Amtrak service, and that he was attempting to represent the points of view he heard expressed by constituents during town halls that he hosted. However, he went on to state that he understood that he would be representing the entire nation as Secretary of Transportation, including communities that relied heavily on Amtrak.

"We appreciate the Committee's diligence in exercising its oversight powers on behalf of America's passengers," said Jim Mathews, Rail Passengers President & CEO. "We're particularly grateful for the support for passengers shown by Senators Jim Moran, Roger Wicker, Maria Cantwell, Andy Kim, Lisa Blunt-Rochester, Jacky Rosen, and Tim Sheehy. Based on Mr. Duffy's response to the bipartisan showing of support for Amtrak, we are happy to endorse his confirmation as Secretary. We stand ready and willing to partner with his Department of Transportation and the Trump Administration to continue upgrading and expanding America's rail network."

*Rail Passengers* is providing a summary of the rail-applicable exchanges that took place during the question-and-answer section of yesterday's hearing.

[Click Here For More, Including Rail Passengers Commentary](#)

## RailNation: DC Updates, Council Meeting Dates, And More

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

There's a new date for the Council business meeting – [it's March 29th](#), a Saturday, all day in downtown DC. Thanks to our good friends and nonprofit partners at Open Gov Hub, we can offer a beautiful, ADA-accessible space for the meeting with all amenities for substantially less than we have had to pay to host our meetings in hotel ballrooms.

Originally, you may recall, we announced that we would hold the Council business meeting in late April, following the workshops. This was done to put more focus on advocacy, to make it easier for non-Council members to participate in our Capitol Hill visits, and to reduce costs for participating in our grassroots work. But many of you pointed out that for those who truly want to take an active part in our Capitol Hill visits while ALSO attending the in-person Council meeting it would require two separate trips – negating the cost savings and adding hassle.

You can thank your hard-working Chair Meredith Richards for coming up with a great answer, the Saturday session in DC. We talked at length earlier this week about how to make it all work and she suggested plopping the business meeting in between the two weeks' of workshops, thus minimizing the long stays or separate trips for those coming from the furthest regions of the country.

I told her then, and again at Wednesday night's Board meeting, "I wish I'd thought of that!"

It's not a perfect answer, but it does make it significantly easier for many members to attend both a workshop session and the in-person Council business meeting. Next year we'll set up the workshops with "bookends" to make Meredith's Saturday session work even better, ensuring that those furthest away are scheduled for either the second half of week one or the first half of week two.

Meanwhile, Open Gov Hub is a great nonprofit partner, which makes it extremely affordable for us to accommodate as many as 100 people in a bright, modern, fully wired meeting space that's convenient to Metro, buses, hotels, and our own headquarters where we'll be conducting the workshops.

**We'll be able to charge just \$75 to attend the in-person Council business meeting.** This fee will include a catered lunch. We'll have the space all day for extended policy discussions, internal Council business, and the conduct of this year's elections...a significant improvement over having just a few hours on the last day of a Spring or Fall meeting.

And of course, if you are a sitting Council member and unable to attend in person, as always you'll be able to participate in the Council deliberations via a livestream.

Remember, as of this year we no longer have a contract with a hotel for the conference, which means you're free to make any kind of arrangement you want for your lodging. To make that easier, we've come up with a list of possible hotels and hostels for you to choose from (including a list of free-breakfast hotels courtesy of Council Member Steve Musen). The hostels are all highly rated – we excluded those with poor reviews – and all are under

\$100 per night.

We've updated the RailNation:DC landing page with all of those details, as well as travel and transportation details for our 1200 G St. NW office location, where we'll host our in-depth workshops. [Click here to learn more.](#)

I really hope we'll see you there!

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## Field Notes

### New York City Congestion Pricing Leads to Fewer People in Cars and more People Taking Public Transit

By Phil Mayer, Rail Passengers Volunteer

On Sunday, January 5, 2025, New York City instituted a congestion pricing scheme where cars entering the central business district of Manhattan south of 60th St. are charged \$9 on weekdays between the hours of 5am and 9pm and on weekends between the hours of 9am and 9pm. Other vehicles such as motorcycles are charged lower charges and small buses and small trucks are charged higher charges.

In transit-rich Manhattan, the absolute vast majority of daily commuters paid some sort of fee to enter the Central Business District as most entered via bus or subway, while only about 30% of drivers accessed the island via a toll based bridge or tunnel. By a 2019 New York state law, the revenue generated from the tolls on drivers will be directed toward maintaining and improving the city's over 100 year old public transit infrastructure.

The early effects of this new policy show fewer cars on the roads, and far more people taking public transportation including buses, the subway, and other regional trains into Manhattan.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (MTA)'s early numbers show 43,000 fewer drivers heading into Manhattan each workday, with drivers traveling from the Queens Midtown Tunnel and the Queensboro Bridge experiencing commute times lessened by 35% and 43% respectively.

The MTA, announced a profound increase in public transportation ridership since the implementation of congestion pricing. The New York City subway experienced a significant increase in ridership. The figure was 3.18 million passengers on Jan. 9, 2025, registering an increase of at least 300,000 more people than on the same day in 2024. The Long Island Railroad trains went from 170,149 passengers on Jan. 5 to 194,574 on Jan. 9, and when compared to last year's figures, it turns out that there is an increase of at least 20,000 more commuters. The Metro-North Commuter Railroad Company, commonly known as Metro-North, a suburban commuter rail service between Manhattan and northern communities around New York City and into Connecticut within 4 days also saw increased ridership by 30,000 more commuters: 139,885 on Jan. 5, 2025, to 167,983 on Jan. 9. Compared with the 2024 numbers, there are nearly 15,000 more tickets sold.

Meanwhile, the MTA said that more improvements are on the way to public transportation, including work on the Second Avenue Subway Phase 2, modern signals for the A train in Brooklyn, and another "big package" of ADA-accessible train stations.

MTA CEO Janno Lieber said that "We've been knocking these out five times as fast as the MTAs in the past, and we're advancing yet another set now that congestion pricing is moving forward."

Congestion pricing has previously been implemented first in Singapore in 1975, and also in London in 2003, and Stockholm in 2006. Each case was met with public opposition, but citizens soon turned to it as they saw that with fewer cars on the road, traffic congestion eased, public safety increased, and air quality improved.

A key takeaway from the foreign examples is that it is important that the revenue from congestion pricing be directed toward public transportation improvement, as people can see a direct link between fewer cars on the roads and improvements in mobility via other modes of transportation.

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

REGISTER HERE!

Registration ends at midnight eastern on March 14th, 2025

## 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 Sets Strict Rules And Announces Closures Ahead Of Presidential Inauguration](#), **The Travel**

Changes to Amtrak's schedule, due to the impact the Inauguration will have on Union Station, start tomorrow the 18th.

- [Gulf Coast Amtrak project update with Knox Ross](#), **WLOX TV**

WLOX TV (Biloxi, MS) sits down with Southern Rail Commission Chairman, and friend of the Association, Knox Ross to talk about the last minute work being done to get Gulf Coast service over the finish line.

- [STB says Sunset Limited on-time performance probe is running on schedule](#), **Trains**

Originally filed by Amtrak in December 2022, the Surface Transportation Board is "on track" for an early summer decision on the on-time performance case against Union Pacific for their treatment of the Sunset Limited.

- [Suffolk County executive: Amtrak coming to Ronkonkoma LIRR station](#), **News 12 Long Island**

The current plan would extend three regional trains between NY & DC east on Long Island to Ronkonoma via Hicksville and Jamaica Station on LIRR tracks.

- [Scranton-to-NYC train project clears another hurdle](#), **Citizens Voice**

The Scranton-to-NYC rail corridor is now in step two of the Corridor ID Program. A Service Development Plan is crucial for securing millions in funding, potentially generating \$84M annually and boosting jobs in PA & NJ!

- [Train Travel in the Northeast: A Cheaper Alternative to Flights](#), **Railway Supply**

The ultimate goal is for passenger rail to be competitive in ALL major corridors across the country - not just in the Northeast.

- [Chesapeake train crossing to get \\$1M for improvements](#), **WAVY**

The eight track Portlock Road crossing in Chesapeake, the most reported crossing in the city, was targeted by the City Council for an overpass for vehicles and pedestrians last summer.

- [Brightline to bring back South Florida commuter program](#), **Trains**

Thanks to a federal grant that paving the way for the expansion of train consists, Brightline is hoping to fill those extra seats with a popular "short haul" program that was shuttered last year.

- [Amtrak Pacific Surfliner Boosts Southern California Travel with \\$10 Fares From San Diego to Santa Barbara](#), **Supporting Regional Mobility and Wildfire Recovery**, **Travel and Tour World**

The LOSSAN Rail Corridor Agency is offering a \$10 fare on Amtrak's Pacific Surfliner - supporting those affected by recent wildfires while promoting exploration of the coastal region.



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

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## Upcoming Events

- [West Central Wisconsin Rail Coalition Annual Meeting](#)  
Tuesday, January 21, 8:30a
- [RIARP Winter Meeting](#)  
Monday, January 27, 5:30p
- [RailNation: DC 2025](#)  
March 24 - April 3

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**, bounced between DC and New York City this week, meeting with allies in DC, attending a Federal Railroad Administration event at DOT headquarters, and then taking part in the first Penn Station Working Group meeting of 2025, while also monitoring confirmation proceedings for DOT Secretary-nominee Sean Duffy.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, briefed Council Members on the association's legislative strategy for 2025, interfaced with Hill offices on two key Congressional hearings, and took part in a briefing on public ownership of rail infrastructure.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, has been focused on data entry of the donations and membership dues sent via check to the DC Headquarters office in December and to-date in January. When taking a break from data entry, Jonsie worked on future fundraising messages, and tended to the administrative and operational needs of the Association.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, staffed both Sean Jeans-Gail's policy briefing with members of the Rail Passengers Council and this month's Board of Directors Meeting. Joe also worked with staff on the initial planning for the regional workshops taking place during our reworked Spring Conference.
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Manager**, is diligently preparing the 2024 End-of-Year tax receipts for our valued donors and members. We are navigating both our current and new software databases to ensure accuracy and efficiency. We aim to have all receipts sent by the end of next week. Thank you for your patience as we work through this process to provide your documents in a timely manner for your 2024 taxes.

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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.**

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View Webinars



Rail Passengers'  
Social Media

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

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## 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.



Charity ✨  
Navigator



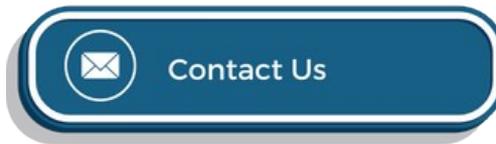
Rail Passengers Association members have access to a full service, nationwide federal credit union with extensive product and service offerings. Signature FCU is the exclusive provider of the [Rail Passengers Association-branded Visa credit card](#) with our logo, which supports our work by giving back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



**RAIL PASSENGERS**

EST. 1967

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