

RAILPASSENGERS



WEEKLY HOTLINE

Issue #1,391–April 18, 2025



Take Action

Association News



Is Private Capital Up To The Texas High-Speed Challenge?

Rail Passengers President & CEO Jim Mathews [reacts to this week's USDOT announcement](#) and wonders if the "free market" is up to the task to take on such a mega-project - one that this Association has been in support of each step of the way.

It's Not 'Speed' That Kills, It's 'Dwell'

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

Bloomberg News recently published a CityLab piece laying out [an interesting plan from New York University's Marron Institute](#), the thesis of which was that we can get a lot faster conventional rail service than we have today just doing a better job modernizing what we already have – leaning on level boarding platforms, electrification, and fast-accelerating locomotives – to reduce dwell time, the true killer of trip-time competitiveness.

"Modeling shows that full implementation can shorten commutes by as much as 29 percent and slash an hour or more off of many inter-city services," writes lead author (and fellow Streetsblog contributor) Nolan Hicks. "In short, the framework will allow American rail planners to deliver the aggregate benefits of high-speed rail at lower costs, while minimizing the regulatory

and political risks.”

Hicks argues that building high-level platforms, everywhere, will speed boarding and disembarking, and also permit operators to adopt railcar designs with big wide doors to further speed boarding and simultaneously solve disability-access challenges. You could save anywhere from 30 to 60 seconds per stop on commuter lines, and maybe even two minutes or more on Amtrak intercity routes. All those minutes really do add up.

Electrification, meanwhile, is not only cleaner but also quicker. If you’ve ever played with a go-kart, you’ll know what this means. A gas-powered kart can take a while to get to top speed, whereas the new electric karts? Careful how hard you step on that pedal, or you’ll go through the safety barrier. A passenger train pulled by a diesel locomotive could take three minutes to reach 80 mph, but an electric loco can do it in 60 seconds or less. Now you’ve added another two minutes per stop back into the equation.

Hicks uses two examples to summarize the step-change improvement you’d get to intercity services using his high-throughput Momentum framework.

“Electrification and full modernization would slash trip times between New York City and Albany down to one hour and 54 minutes to two hours and five minutes, which is a half-hour quicker than current service,” Hicks writes. “Or take the route between Chicago and Detroit, large portions of which are publicly owned. Amtrak #352 travels between the two cities in five hours and 25 minutes. Momentum, combined with long-planned improvements to the Chicago approach, would slash trip times to three hours and 50 minutes. That’s an hour faster than driving and roughly the same as flying, when counting time spent at the airport.”

There are many good ideas Hicks advances here in what he calls [the “Momentum” framework](#). We ought to do them and do them quickly. They are cost-effective and deliver real, meaningful improvement to many, many riders everywhere. **I heartily endorse them!**

For more from Jim, [CLICK HERE](#)

Trump Administration Takes Control of Penn Station Overhaul

[by Sean Jeans-Gail | V.P. of Government Affairs + Policy](#)

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) [announced this week](#) it will be asserting federal control over the Penn Station Reconstruction project in New York City, replacing the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) as project lead. Amtrak, backed by the USDOT, will take over management of the project that the USDOT deemed “critical”.

USDOT also announced that, as part of its new approach to the Penn Station project, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is rescoping and reducing the federal grant for project development. They argue this approach will “save taxpayers approximately \$120 million while still ensuring a safe, modern, and efficient transit hub for the nation’s financial capital.”

“Under President Trump’s vision, we’re restoring accountability to infrastructure projects,” said FRA Chief Counsel Kyle Fields. “By empowering Amtrak and leveraging private investment, we’re guaranteeing a Penn Station that’s safer, more reliable, and built to serve the American people for generations.”

The USDOT announcement refers to a \$72.5 million Federal-State Partnership-NEC Grant Program award to MTA for “New York Penn Station Reconstruction”. The grant, awarded in Nov. 2024, was intended to fund environmental review and other project development activities, including “increasing concourse capacity and access both within and outside the station, improving ventilation and fire safety, and installing user-friendly wayfinding.”

USDOT states that with “the reduced allocation in its separate FSP Program grant, Amtrak can pursue a master developer to examine both reconstruction and potential expansion of the station.” However, the [accompanying letter to Amtrak](#) doesn’t clarify what elements will be cut or how precisely these efficiencies will be achieved.

New York Leadership Responds

In her response to the announcement, New York Governor Kathy Hochul (D) seemed delighted to let the project be someone else’s problem.

“In multiple meetings with President Trump, I requested that the federal government fund the long-overdue overhaul of Penn Station,” Gov. Hochul wrote in a statement. “Clearly that effort has been successful, and I want to thank the president and Secretary Duffy for taking on the sole responsibility to deliver the beautiful new \$7 billion station that New Yorkers deserve. This is a major victory for New Yorkers, and the use of federal funds will save New York taxpayers \$1.3 billion that would have otherwise been necessary for this project.”

MTA, for its part, tried to strike a balance, saying it welcomed federal leadership while reasserting its central role in shaping the future of the busiest rail station in the Western Hemisphere.

"As the major leaseholder in the station, we expect to participate in the Administration's and Amtrak's efforts to ensure future plans meet the needs of everyone who uses it," MTA Chair and CEO Janno Lieber.

[Head to our website to read more of Sean's analysis](#)

Siemens Rail Infrastructure CEO In Helo Crash

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

Since publication of our Hotline update last week, we learned that among the victims of last week's fatal sightseeing helicopter crash into the Hudson River near Jersey City was Augustin Escobar, CEO of [Rail Infrastructure at Siemens Mobility](#).

Escobar had brought his entire family with him on this sightseeing trip, and all of them died in the wreck – his wife, Merce, and three young children.

Roland Busch, the CEO of Mobility's corporate parent, Siemens AG, issued a statement a few days ago expressing deep sadness from "the loss of our colleague and friend, Augustin Escobar, and his beloved family."

Busch said, "this tragedy is hard for all of us to comprehend and put into words."

[CLICK HERE](#) to continue

Field Notes

Urgent Call to Action for Texas Rail Passengers!

[Heartland Flyer passenger train through Fort Worth at risk if Texas doesn't allocate funding](#), Fort Worth Report

The future of the Heartland Flyer, a crucial passenger train connecting Fort Worth and Oklahoma City, is at risk! Recent budget cuts have left Texas's funding share of approximately \$2.6 million annually in jeopardy. With ridership soaring by over 14% in 2024, totaling 123,584 passengers, this service is more vital than ever.

Local officials are rallying for the restoration of funding, emphasizing that the Heartland Flyer not only supports college students and tourists but also injects an estimated \$18 million into our local economy each year.

As negotiations over the state budget continue, we need your voice!

What can you do?

[Use this link](#) to find our local representatives and contact their office to express your support for the Heartland Flyer.

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.

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!

- [Kansas funds passenger rail expansion](#), SMART Union

Thanks to union-led efforts and support from state officials in the Sunflower State, Kansas Governor Laura Kelly has signed the state's FY26 budget which includes money for passenger rail improvements - and putting the Heartland Flyer extension closer to reality.

- [\[VIDEO\] NJ Transit, Amtrak summit held to focus on improvements](#), CBS News NY

Hoping to avoid a repeat of last year's delay & cancellation-ridden

"Summer from Hell", NJ Governor Phil Murphy called together a summit of officials from Amtrak and NJ TRANSIT to discuss service improvements and mitigation efforts.

- [Studies, plans for Green Bay Amtrak service, new Wisconsin routes still in the works](#), Fox 11 News

While the "backdoor pilot" plans for special event trains to bring NFL Draft attendees from Milwaukee to Green Bay did not quite see the light of day, advocates and local officials are not giving up on the idea for a permanent corridor.

- [Opinion: NCTD's clean, well-connected Sprinter is a rare public transit success](#), Times of San Diego

"Clean, convenient, and efficient!" This Times of San Diego op-ed highlights the success of the SPRINTER and showcases the vital role of public transit in connecting communities (in car happy SoCal) - especially when so many agencies are still struggling post-pandemic.

- [Improvements on track for Latrobe's Amtrak station](#), TribLIVE.com

Long needed ADA and platform upgrades to the Latrobe (PA) Amtrak station, which sits next to the original 120+ year old station (now a restaurant), will begin this Spring - with a target to be completed next summer.

- [Antioch Council approves spending \\$225K more for Amtrak Station area improvements](#), Antioch Herald

The Antioch (CA) City Council approved a total of \$375k for upgrading the Amtrak station that was scheduled to be closed by the San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority (SJJPA) Board of Directors in 2023. Funds will boost safety, accessibility, & aesthetics and aims to keep the station open amid the closure concerns.

- [First phase of NJ entrance to new Gateway project rail tunnel should be done by fall](#), northernjersey.com

The Gateway Program will hit a big milestone this fall when the Tonelle Avenue overpass, the site of the initial Gateway groundbreaking in 2023, is expected to be completed. Once finished, the overpass location will then host one of the two boring machines as part of the Palisades tunnel project.



[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

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**, had an extra-busy week responding to follow-ups from last week's appearance before House Transportation & Infrastructure staff, working with infrastructure partners across the country to build business-community support for IIJA programs, tracking developments with the Texas high-speed rail project, and giving several press interviews – including a multi-hour sit-down in the DC office with National Public Radio.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, continues to work with stakeholder groups on preparing FY2026 appropriations requests and reauthorization proposals for the upcoming House submission deadline.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, processed membership dues and donations sent to the DC office, and tended to the administrative and operational needs of the Association.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, joined the fall meeting planning committee this week as we kicked off the run-up to RailNation: San Antonio and has been knee-deep in county

- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, continues to support members and donors through the CharityEngine Constituent Portal. We are currently working on configuring the self-service *Head of Household* link, which will allow Family-level members and above to add or remove sub-members from their accounts. In the meantime, please direct any requests for this benefit to Kimberly at knotarianni@narprail.org. Be sure to include the names and email addresses of the sub-members that need to be associated with your account.
- **Lili Leonard, Development Assistant**, continues to plug away at outreach for corporate support and sponsorships from rail-industry businesses. Please email me at leonard@narprail.org if you would like to learn more!

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

User Name

Password

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 [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.

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:

Welcome To Your Membership Dashboard



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!



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 latest 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

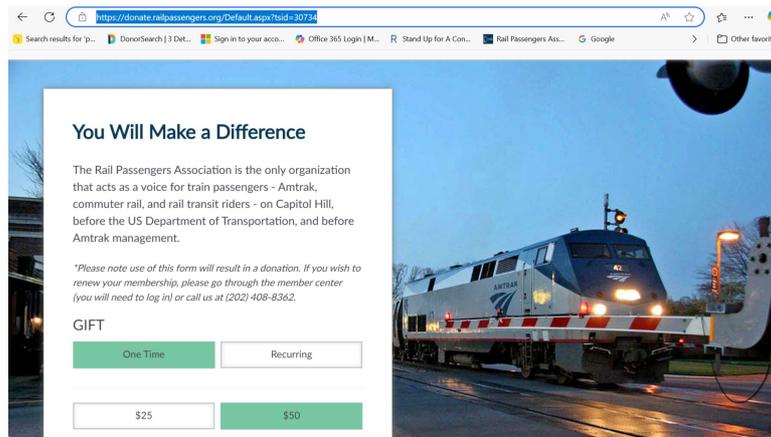
Thanks to a collaborative effort between Rail Passengers NYS Council Member Nathanael Nerode & juckins.net's Chris Juckins, we have been able to completely update our timetables resource page.

[CLICK HERE](#)

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>



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <https://donate.railpassengers.org/Default.aspx?tsid=30734>. The page features a white donation form on the left and a photograph of an Amtrak train on the right. The form has the heading "You Will Make a Difference" and a paragraph explaining the organization's role. Below this, there is a "GIFT" section with two buttons: "One Time" (highlighted in green) and "Recurring". At the bottom of the form, there are two input fields for donation amounts: "\$25" and "\$50" (highlighted in green). A small note reads: "Please note use of this form will result in a donation. If you wish to renew your memberships, please go through the member center (you will need to log in) or call us at (202) 408-8362."

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.

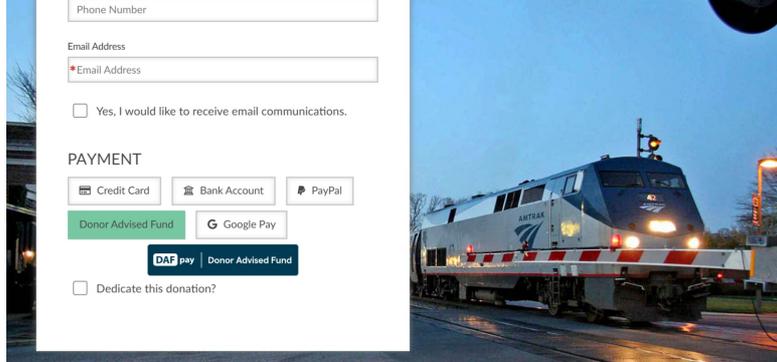
- Setup ACH or E-Check with your bank of choice
- Use a Debit or Credit Card to pay online, or
- Send a check to 1200 G Street NW Suite 520 Washington, DC 20005

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)



Membership Form:

Rail Passengers' Webinar Series
 Other
 Yes, I prefer communication by email rather than by mail.

PAYMENT

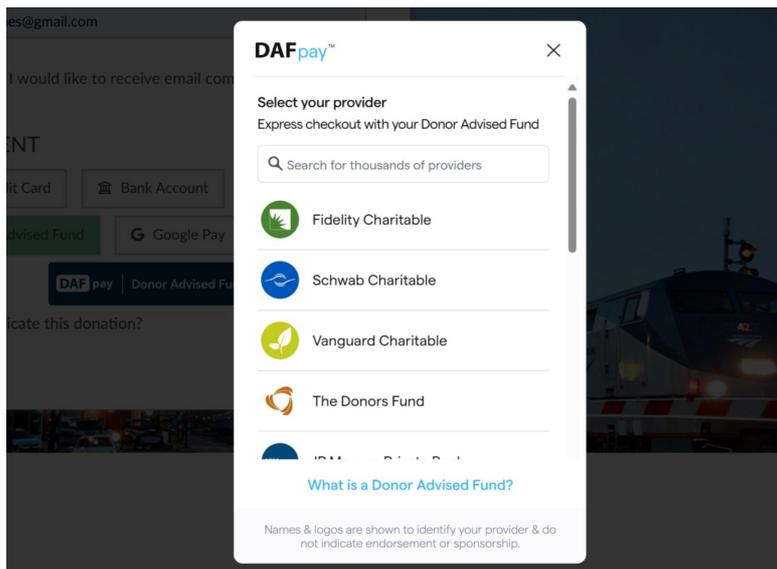
Credit Card
 Bank Account
 Donor Advised Fund
 Google Pay

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, 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 (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.



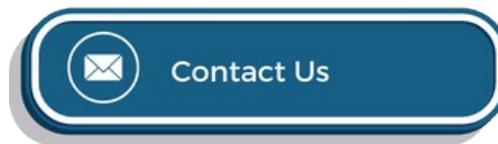
Rail Passengers Association members have access to a full service, nationwide federal credit union with extensive product and service offerings. Signature FCU is the exclusive provider of the [Rail Passengers Association-branded Visa credit card](#) with our logo, which supports our work by giving back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

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