

RAILPASSENGERS



WEEKLY HOTLINE

Issue #1,396–May 23, 2025



Take Action

NOTE: Due to staff availability, and the post-holiday week, there will be no Hotline next Friday (May 30th).

The Hotline will return on June 6th.



"All gave some; some gave all. Remember them this Memorial Day."

Association News

Not a Day over 57

58 years and the core mission remains:

1967



1990



2011



2017



RAIL PASSENGERS
ASSOCIATION

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF RAILROAD PASSENGERS

More trains

more trains to more places for more people

Our late founder Anthony Haswell officially incorporated the Association on May 18th, 1967 - setting the stage for him, fellow advocates, and elected officials to be deeply involved in the development, refinement, and enactment of the legislation which created Amtrak.

58 years later, we continue the fight for, not just Amtrak riders, but for ALL rail passengers around the country.

Help us celebrate by donating \$58 to continue the fight.
www.railpassengers.org/donate

Amtrak Holds Public Board Meeting, Highlights Financial Metrics

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

The Amtrak Board of Directors convened a public meeting to review the company's operational performance, capital delivery projects, and long-term planning. A key focus was on financial and ridership metrics, particularly the strong ticket revenue performance across Amtrak's network. The PowerPoint presented during the meeting [is available online](#).

A Focus on Metrics

The meeting highlighted strong ticket revenue performance across the network, driven by strong customer demand. The Long Distance Routes (LDR) financial performance has been boosted by a successful effort to return coach and sleeper cars to service. On a more negative note, the recent loss of the Horizon cars will negatively impact State-Supported routes until the Airo trainsets are delivered in 2026.

Amtrak executives pointed to lack of capacity on the Northeast Corridor (NEC) as a hindrance on growth. The capacity constraints stem from delays in getting FRA clearance of the NextGen Acelas. However, a strategy of "quick turns" on the Northeast Regional offset some of these constraints, allowing for NEC ridership growth. Additionally, Amtrak is holding to a Spring 2025 launch goal for revenue service for the NextGen Acelas (the last day of spring is June 19).

Amtrak executives also highlighted the massive portfolio of capital renewal projects the railroad is advancing, thanks to the Infrastructure Investment in Jobs Act. The company is overseeing \$6.8 billion worth of capital spending in Fiscal Year 2025, a number that's projected to jump to \$9.5 billion in FY26.

Board Member Questions

Vice Chairman Joel Szabat pointed out that, when the new Acelas were introduced, the higher number of seats per train would dramatically increase capacity. He asked if the company was confident that the demand would be there. Chief Commercial Officer Eliot Hamlich responded that Szabat's read was "generally correct," with the new Acelas increasing service line capacity by 50%, and that they are "very confident there is demand out there for the service."

Elaine Clegg asked whether LDRs that share infrastructure or overlap with existing State-Supported corridors (as identified in [the FRA's expansion study](#)) would have an advantage in Amtrak's expansion planning, considering the potential for cost-sharing and operational efficiencies. Hamlich said that was a "fair assumption," while stating that—without new equipment to add routes—the only path available to improve financial performance on the LDRs is "driving incremental demand and cost containment".

Open Meetings Requirements in the Spotlight

The decision to have this meeting in a public forum *may* be a response to proposed legislation that would mandate Amtrak comply with the Open Meetings Act—although the next scheduled board meeting open to the public won't be until December. It's also worth mentioning that much of the information included in this board meeting has been shared in other venues—including at *Rail Passengers'* RailNation:DC event earlier this year. This is also the kind of data one would expect to find in Amtrak's annual legislative grant request, which hasn't been released to the public this year.

Rail Passengers supports the goals of the Amtrak Transparency and Accountability for Passengers and Taxpayers Act (H.R.188), which would require Amtrak's Board of Directors to comply with the Government in the Sunshine Act, and we believe it should be moved as part of a comprehensive surface transportation reauthorization. The bill, sponsored by Rep. Troy Nehls (R-TX), would introduce greater transparency into decision-making, while providing necessary exceptions for contract negotiations, collective bargaining agreements, and matters involving the employment status of individual employees.

It's worth noting that we've heard from a few of our members who found the content of the public board meeting underwhelming (even "boring"). This shouldn't be a surprise; open meetings were never going to provide a magic window into the internal dialogues happening at the railroad. The fact remains: an expectation that this kind of information is provided to the public is beneficial, and good governance is often boring.

Unique Passengers, Unique Needs: Brightline and Tshiuetin Rail

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

I co-chaired the North American Railway Interiors Summit this week in Orlando, a conference staged by the international Red Cabin group, and among the many big takeaways from the two-and-a-half day event was this one seemingly simple, yet profound, truth: serving passengers best means listening to what they need.

What brought it home for me was the comparison between Brightline (which co-hosted the event along with trainset supplier Siemens) and the Tshiuetin Railway, operated by Tshiuetin Rail Transportation. If you just look at the surface, nothing could be more different. But a deeper dive reveals they're both especially sensitive to what their passengers want and deliver it with passion and dedication.

Brightline, launched in 2018 and now serving six stops between Miami and Orlando, Fla., is flashy, new, fast, smooth, and frankly gorgeous. Generously sized cars, wide aisles, inviting seats, world-beating food and amenities, a consistent high-end station experience, and a relentless dedication to passengers – what Brightline executives all describe as the “hospitality mindset” – all make riding Brightline a real treat. And it's even more satisfying when you zip past all the stopped cars on I-95 or Route 1 at close to 99 mph.

Brightline carried more than 2.7 million passengers last year on a 235-mile corridor stretching along the Florida coast, serving a mix of leisure and business travelers and becoming a national-media darling along the way.



The Tshiuetin Railway operates [a roughly 12-hour journey with many stops](#) – including many flag stops – between Emeril, Labrador, and the town of Schefferville in the far north, a place that cannot be reached by roads of any kind. Born from the spine of what was a mining railroad, Tshiuetin (an Innu First Nations word meaning “North Wind”) became the first fully tribally owned regular railroad in North America about 20 years ago. Three First Nations – the Innu Takuaikan Uashat Mak Mani-Utenam, the Kawawachikamach, and the Matimekush-Lac John – bought the railroad from the mining company for a dollar and began operations in 2005.

[To Continue Jim's Blog, Click Here](#)

Byford Expected To Lead Penn Station Redevelopment

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

Even though there's no official word, it appears that Andy Byford – the former New York MTA head who wound up at Amtrak to lead high-speed rail efforts – is going back to the Big Apple to do what he does best: putting troubled programs back on track.

[It was widely reported on Friday afternoon](#) that the White House asked to put Byford in charge of the sprawling, and contentious, Penn Station Redevelopment program. Amtrak's Board has to approve the move. Byford remains an Amtrak employee.

Just as I warmly welcomed [Amtrak hiring Byford in 2023](#), I have to applaud this move by the Trump Administration. He has a long and impressive track record of fixing broken programs and moving seemingly unmovable bureaucracies. He was so good at it that he annoyed then Gov. Andrew Cuomo in 2020, and resigned to go launch Transport for London's Elizabeth line.

Now, New York City newspapers are trumpeting headlines about the "return of Train Daddy" to New York City, or "[Daddy's Home.](#)" You have to be awfully good to get the [New York Post](#) AND the *New York Times* simultaneously on your side. But his success in turning around the City's subway network from 2018 to 2020 after 2017's infamous "Summer of Hell" endeared him to weary straphangers across all five boroughs, who gave him the "Train Daddy" nickname that seems to have stuck with him ever since.

As a guy with deep New York City roots, I can relate. And as someone currently serving on the [Penn Station Working Group](#), I'm hoping that once again we at Rail Passengers will be able to work alongside him to get this thing truly underway.

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.

ICYMI



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!

[Video] ["Federal Rail and Transit Update"](#), Virginians for High Speed Rail

Did you miss the boss joining our friends at Virginians for High Speed Rail last week as part of their Town Hall series? Click the above link and check it out!

[Our Passenger Rail Commitment to Americans](#), Railway Age

Amtrak's President Roger Harris responds directly to Association President & CEO Jim Mathews on the company's "workforce adjustments".

[Dolly Parton Runs a Train Busier Than 27 States](#), The Transit Guy

An eye-opening, if not slightly depressing, look at the historic 2.5 mile rail loop that is the Dollywood Express from our friend - blogger, advocate, Rail Passengers NY Council Member, and former webinar guest - Hayden Clarkin

[Popular train Borealis marks 1 year in service](#), KARE 11

Back in 2019, the Association prepared a research note at the request of All Aboard Minnesota on the potential ridership and economic benefits of a 2nd run between Chicago and the Twin Cities. That report, conservatively, found that this new service would attract 155,500 passengers annually.

As the Borealis celebrates its 1st birthday this week, we are happy to report that we were just a little off in our research - by about 60,000 riders.

[Does Transportation Advocacy Have a Place In the Wake of a Deadly Tornado?](#), Streetsblog USA

This story is something very different from what we usually have in this section, but one we feel is very important. At what point during an emergency situation do we put advocacy to the side and let empathy direct our actions?

[NJ Transit, BLET reach tentative agreement; rail service to resume Tuesday](#), Progressive Railroading

Good news for commuters in NJ/NY. While we wait for BLET members to have a final vote on the tentative deal next month, NJ Transit service resumed on Tuesday.

[Winter Park Ski Train ridership increases 153% in 2025](#), Denver Gazette

We think calling this a "roaring success" might be understating it. Expanded service and reduced fares led to trains at, on average, 89% capacity for the season.

[Amtrak now fully operational at Southern Illinois Multimodal Station in Carbondale](#), WSILTV

The City of New Orleans, Illini, and Saluki have a new home in Southern Illinois.



[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

Upcoming Briefing

NEXT STOP: SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC TRANSIT AND MOBILITY

Series: The Next Era of Transportation and Infrastructure



Elaine Nessel
Executive Director,
Coalition for
America's
Gateways and
Trade Corridors



John Robert Smith
Chair, Transportation for
America



Rep. Valerie Foushee
U.S.
Representative
(D-N.C.)



Sean Jeans-Gail
VP, Government
Affairs and Policy, Rail
Passengers
Association

 **May 28 @ 2:00 p.m. ET**

@eesionline

Our VP of Government Affairs + Policy, Sean Jeans-Gail, will be joining this [Environmental and Energy Study Institute \(EESI\)](#) panel that "will explore the past, current, and future role of rail in the U.S. transportation sector and highlight key rail programs under the surface transportation bill."

More info at <https://www.eesi.org/briefings/view/052825trains>

JOIN ME

at **GBTA Sustainability Summit**
on June 10 in Washington, D.C.!

FEATURED SESSION
HOW TO: Integrate Rail
into Your Corporate Travel Program

See you there?



Jim Mathews
President & CEO
Rail Passengers Association



GBTA Summit 2025 | Sustainability Summit
Washington DC, June 10

At this year's [GBTA | Global Business Travel Association](#) Sustainability Summit, we're taking a broader approach—moving beyond carbon-focused discussions to include crucial social and environmental considerations.

Join us on June 10 in Washington, D.C. to collaborate, learn, and take action toward a more sustainable and responsible travel industry. Let's make the industry resilient together.

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**, traveled straight from the Maine legislature in Augusta to Orlando, Fla., where he co-chaired the North American Railway Interiors Innovation Summit. The event brought together designers, manufacturers, and operators for small-group hands-on workshops on how to think more creatively to improve the experience for rail passengers of all kinds, whether on long-haul trains, regionals, commuters, or transit. He also took part in several press interviews.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, spent the week talking with reporters, fielding Surface Transportation Reauthorization requests from Congressional offices, tracking Amtrak's public Board Meeting, and preparing for a legislative briefing next week on Capitol Hill.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, took her first trip on the Floridian from Washington, DC Union Station to Orlando, Florida. Once in Orlando, she attended the Railway Interior Innovation Summit USA 2025 and took a tour of Brightline's base camp in Orlando. Jonsie will be on 40 heading home Friday night.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, spent time this week designing, cutting, and editing content for our social media channels, jotting down some summer merch fundraiser ideas, and spoke to a number of supporters/members on passenger rail issues around the country. Joe will also be off next week recovering from a procedure (everything is fine!) and will return to work the week of the 2nd.
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, as Memorial Day weekend approaches, I wanted to take a moment to express my gratitude for the brave men, women and their families who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom. Their courage and dedication are a constant reminder of the freedom we enjoy. Wishing all of you a peaceful and reflective Memorial Day weekend.
- **Lili Leonard, Development Assistant**, spent time this week working refining our Community Partners program. Jim and Jonsie attended the Railway Interior Innovation Summit this week, and we have lots of follow-ups to do after productive meetings! Happy Memorial Day; I am grateful to those who made the ultimate sacrifice to protect our freedoms.

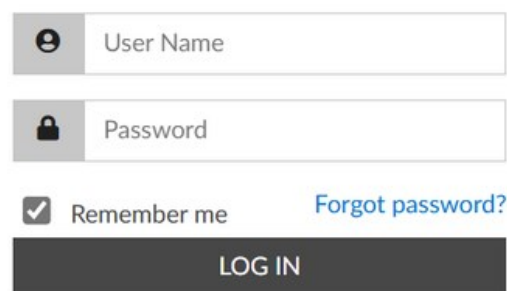
Starting **Wednesday, February 19th**, all membership, donation, and event registration transactions are being processed through **CharityEngine**. **Neon** is no longer the Association's CRM of record.

?? 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



The screenshot shows a login interface with a dark header containing the text "Log in". Below the header are two input fields: "User Name" with a person icon and "Password" with a lock icon. Below these fields are two links: "Remember me" with a checked checkbox and "Forgot password?". At the bottom is a dark button labeled "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](#)

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.

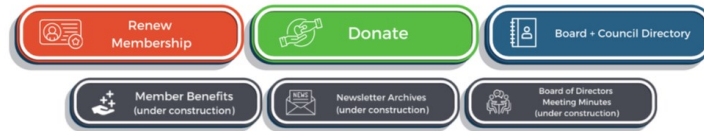
Thank you for your patience and cooperation.

?? 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:

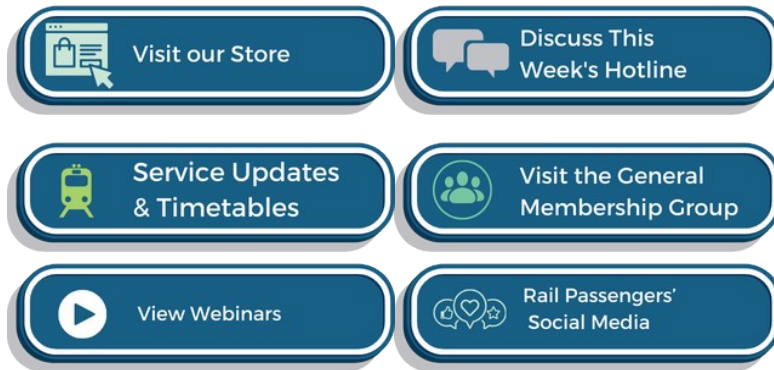
Your new membership number will contain **seven digits**.

?? **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!

We Have Merch!





Rail Passengers Timetables

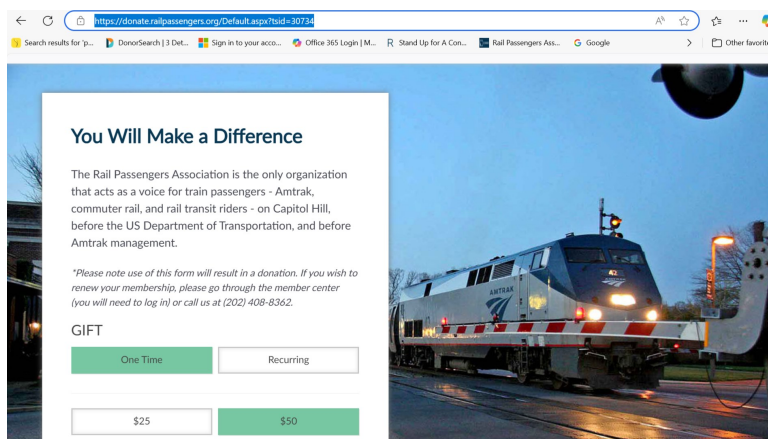
Thanks to a collaborative effort between Rail Passengers NYS Council Member Nathanael Nerode & juckins.net's Chris Juckins, we have been able to completely update our timetables resource page.

[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>



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

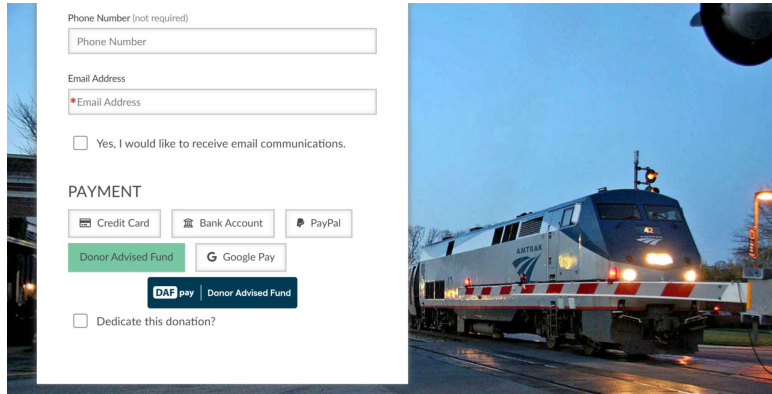
flexibility in the way dues are paid. Skip the hassle and [contact us](#) today for help setting up automatic or online payments.

- 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

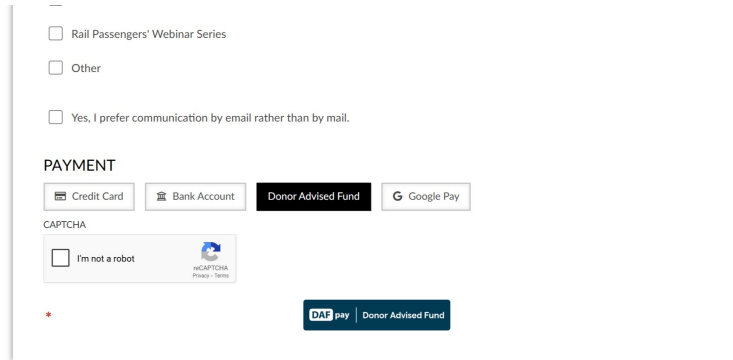
Email Address
*Email Address

☐ Yes, I would like to receive email communications.

PAYMENT

☐ Dedicate this donation?

Membership Form:



☐ Rail Passengers' Webinar Series

☐ Other

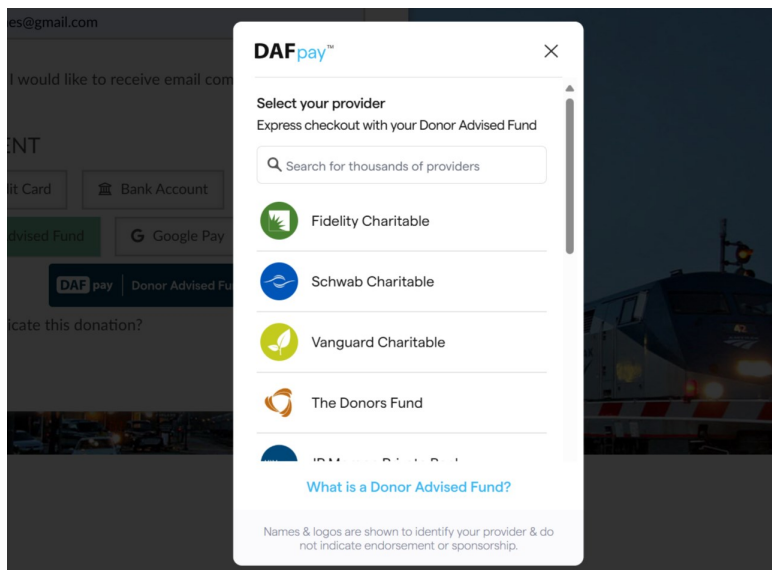
☐ Yes, I prefer communication by email rather than by mail.

PAYMENT

CAPTCHA

☐ I'm not a robot

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.



DAFpay™

Select your provider
Express checkout with your Donor Advised Fund

Search for thousands of providers

- Fidelity Charitable
- Schwab Charitable
- Vanguard Charitable
- The Donors Fund

[What is a Donor Advised Fund?](#)

Names & logos are shown to identify your provider & do not indicate endorsement or sponsorship.

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 bucksliip, 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.

Charity
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.



Contact Us

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS:





RAILPASSENGERS

EST. 1967

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