



Photo credit: Jeff Pletcher



FRIDAY HOTLINE

#1426

JANUARY 30TH, 2026



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NOTICE: Looking for your 2025 membership/donation tax documents?

[Click here](#) for instructions.

Association News

Thaw Gateway Funding Now

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

As of this writing, we are days away from making one of the biggest infrastructure blunders in the history of the United States, and that's no exaggeration.

On Tuesday, the Gateway Development Corp. announced that [construction on the Hudson Tunnel Project will "pause" on Feb. 6th](#) if the disbursement of previously committed Federal funding isn't restored.

That money has been frozen since October. This is despite the fact that the Federal government has already signed contracts for the work -- you know, legally binding documents saying you promise to do something and that you could find yourself before a court if you break your promise. And that Congress has already authorized and appropriated that money. And also that the Northeast Corridor powers 20 percent of the nation's gross domestic product. And that construction will generate 95,000 jobs and \$19.6 billion in economic activity. And the reality that when the North River Tunnel repair inevitably occurs, if we haven't built the new tubes taking that tunnel out of service it will lop off \$16 billion in annual U.S. GDP and cut Amtrak service between New York and Washington, D.C., in half.

And, and, and...

Back in October, DOT said it was suspending funding to the project as part of a broader review of the GDC's Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Program. Congress first enacted the DBE in 1983. It has been largely uncontroversial during the life of the program, with successive Congresses reauthorizing it in each and every subsequent surface and aviation authorization spanning the entire 42 years since it was first put into law. DOT says its review is based on an interim final rule that bars race- and sex-based contracting requirements from Federal grants...even though [the rule](#) wasn't even published until two days after DOT said it was suspending the New York projects.

Blaming "Chuck Schumer and Democrats" for "standing in the way of a deal for the Gateway Tunnel Project by refusing to negotiate with the Trump administration," [the White House on Tuesday declared through spokesperson Kush Desai](#) that "there is nothing stopping Democrats from prioritizing the interests of Americans over illegal aliens and getting this project back on track."

Standing in the way of a deal that was already negotiated and closed? With contracts signed? With work already underway, on time and on budget? And

what do “illegal aliens” have to do with ensuring that this 116-year-old tunnel -- the pulsing carotid artery of the U.S. -- is finally repaired and modernized?

This infrastructure project is just too important to allow any side to play partisan politics.

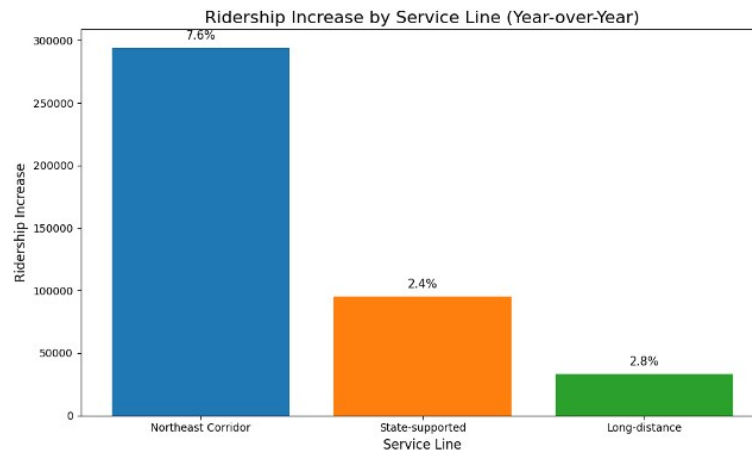
[\[FOR MORE, CLICK HERE\]](#)

Amtrak Board Briefed on Strong Q1 Ridership, but Warned Capital Projects Will Present Challenges in the Year Ahead

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

Amtrak executives reported record firstquarter ridership and ticket revenue for the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2026 during a public board meeting the railroad hosted Wednesday. However, company leaders cautioned that equipment shortages and major infrastructure projects—and their associated track outages—will present challenges throughout the rest of the year.

Chief Financial Officer Costin Corneanu told the board that ridership climbed by 422,000 passengers compared to the same period last year, a 4.7% yearoveryear increase, exceeding internal forecasts by 49,000 riders. Growth was seen across all business lines, with the Northeast Corridor (NEC) up 294,000 passenger trips, statesupported services up 95,000, and longdistance trains up 33,000.



However, reduced capacity on State-supported routes following the retirement of the Horizon car fleet provided stiff financial headwinds. Even so, ticket revenue on those routes ticked up nearly 1%.

Long-distance services showed notable financial improvement, with a 9.9% reduction in losses driven by higher perticket yields and modest capacity increases. Corneanu and Chief Commercial Officer Eliot Hamlich attributed the gains to rising demand—particularly for sleeper accommodations—and better on-timer performance along key corridors. Hamlich summarized it succinctly as “more riders traveling further paying more.”

Hamlich went on to warn that “equipment delays and major infrastructure outages” would likely constrain the company’s ability to sustain its early momentum.

A major challenge remains the delayed rollout of the NextGen Acela fleet. Only eight trainsets are currently in service, representing half of Amtrak’s active highspeed equipment. Reliability issues—especially door malfunctions requiring recalibration by manufacturer Alstom—are limiting capacity while the aging legacy Acela fleet approaches retirement.

Operationally, the NEC is also strained by two major capital projects. The Penn Access project, which adds MetroNorth service into Penn Station, has forced a 20% service reduction since early January and will continue through March 30, with additional outages expected May through November. Meanwhile, the Portal North Bridge cutover will reduce service by 50% between Newark and Secaucus from Feb. 13 to March 16 as trains are shifted onto the first completed span of the new highlevel bridge.

Amtrak emphasized that while shortterm disruptions will be significant, both infrastructure upgrades and the full arrival of the NextGen fleet are essential for longterm reliability and future growth.

Eno Is Right About IIJA

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

This week, the Eno Center for Transportation [released a new report](#)

examining what comes next for intercity passenger rail as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) approaches expiration in September. Eno's work matters because it reflects how transportation policy is being discussed in the mainstream among the analysts, budgeteers, and decision-makers who help us to shape Federal surface transportation policy.

For passenger rail supporters, the report's central conclusion will sound familiar, and I'm glad they've reached the same place as we have.

Eno argues that allowing Federal passenger rail funding to lapse back into the old cycle of annual uncertainty would squander the progress made under IIJA, not just by slowing projects, but by actively undoing the capacity that has finally been built to deliver them. In other words, IIJA didn't just fund rail projects. It changed behavior.

That mirrors what we've been saying since IIJA passed — and what the evidence now makes hard to ignore. Basically, IIJA worked because certainty works. Eno's report makes a critical distinction that often gets lost in the political debate. The most important feature of IIJA wasn't simply the dollar amount, but the five-year advance appropriations structure that gave Amtrak, states, and the Federal Railroad Administration something they almost never have: predictability.

That certainty allowed agencies to hire staff, plan complex projects, negotiate multi-year procurements, and sequence construction in ways that reduce disruption and cost. As Eno documents, major Northeast Corridor megaprojects that had lingered unfunded for decades are now fully funded for the first time. Fleet replacement programs are underway. ADA station compliance is finally accelerating nationwide. Corridor planning has moved from aspiration to pipeline...a slow, sluggish pipeline, to be sure, but a pipeline, nonetheless.

This is exactly why we warned early on that IIJA could not be treated as a one-time surge. Rail infrastructure doesn't work on annual appropriations whiplash. You can't staff up, plan responsibly, and then slam on the brakes without consequences. In fact, slamming those brakes could cost U.S. industry a collective one trillion dollars, and our national gross domestic product some \$600 billion ([Read our first caution on that note by clicking here.](#))

Now we face what some people call a "hidden risk," but one that I think is really obvious and out in the open, and that's losing the capacity we just built. Eno's report makes the very important point that a real danger in 2026 isn't merely a pause in new projects. It's the dismantling of institutional capacity.

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

Field Notes

Please email [Joe Aiello](#) if you have any local, state or regional stories/projects (even something you know or experienced happening overseas) that you would like to write about and see highlighted in the Hotline.

Calling All Readers!

Do you have a favorite transit/train photo (or photos) you have taken from your travels around the country, or even around the world? Would you like to see them featured in our Hotline social media post each week (with credit, of course)?

Send them to Joe Aiello @ jaiello@narprail.org with the subject "HOTLINE PHOTO"

Hotline Links

A curated selection of passenger rail and transportation stories from this week. Check out our social media feeds to read breaking news and join the conversation!

[Amtrak restores NYC-Albany trains, dropping cheaper Metro-North alternative](#), Gothamist

The good news is that full service between NYC and Albany is returning, but it's going to come with a cost and fewer station options.

[Passengers react to Amtrak train derailing in Northfield, Mass.](#), NEWS10 ABC

Reactions and comments from those onboard the NY-bound Vermonter that

derailed Tuesday afternoon in MA

[Phoenix council spikes Capitol light rail line. Alternative route might start work in 2031, KJZZ](#)

Members of the Arizona Statehouse had no issues okaying nearly a \$1B to widen I-10 (which has proven to do nothing but create more traffic) but needed to strong-arm members of the PHX City Council in order to kill a voter approved light rail expansion.

[Struggling public transit systems will cause harm to communities throughout DFW, North Texas Daily](#)

North Texas Daily opinion writer Kyson Barber gives his views on the ongoing story of four communities contemplating about cutting ties with the DART system because they feel that they aren't getting what they pay for. But the alternatives are much worse.

[Brightline announces key leadership changes for next phase of growth, Biscayne Bay Tribune](#)

Big changes to Brightline in the form of former Eurostar and Siemens France CEO Nicolas Petrovic

[Keolis receives new contract for Virginia Railway Express operations, Trains](#)

Thanks to a new (potentially 15-year) contract that officially begins in July, Keolis North America will continue to operate VRE's 32 weekday trains on the Fredericksburg & Manassas Lines

[Utility Work for East Valley Light Rail Project to Bring Months of Closures, Santa Monica Mirror](#)

LA Metro's East San Fernando Valley Light Rail Transit Project is still a handful of years away from being in service, but there is plenty of work being done to make sure they hit the 2031 target.

[People 'choosing rideshare or transit' due to city parking frustrations, ITS International](#)

In places with robust public transit options, parking should be a hassle for those who are able.



**WE ARE WORKING ON A DISCORD SERVER.
STAY TUNED FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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

Advocacy Workshops + Council Business Meeting

RAIL PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

2026 DC WORKSHOPS
+ Days on the Hill

April 20th - April 24th, 2026
Rail Passengers Office
1200 G St NW, Suite 520

[DC ADVOCACY WORKSHOPS REGISTRATION](#)

Registration is \$125.00

Due to the space limitations of our office, each of the sessions is **limited to 20 tickets** and there will be no on-site or virtual registration. Please attend the session for the state you reside in. **Registration ends at Midnight eastern on Friday, April 10th.**

The in-office workshops will run from 8:00a to 4:00p. Lunch will be provided (*attendees are responsible for their own breakfast*). Attendees will be responsible for securing their own lodging needs.

Stay tuned to www.railpassengers.org/dc2026 for more information.



[2026 SPRING COUNCIL BUSINESS MEETING REGISTRATION](#)

In-person registration is \$99
Virtual registration is free

The 2026 Spring Council Business Meeting will take place on Wednesday, April 22nd from 8:00a to 4:00p. Lunch will be provided (*attendees are responsible for their own breakfast*). Registration ends on Friday, April 10th at Midnight eastern. There will be no on-site registration.

Stay tuned to www.railpassengers.org/2026SpringCouncilMeeting for more information.

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**, spent more time this week dealing with travel delays than probably anything else! But Jim was still able to meet with key allies and stakeholders in DC this week...even as the District struggled to chip itself out of the snow and the ice.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, spent the week responding to policy analysis requests from Rail Passenger leadership, while also responding to the latest news around the political fight endangering the Hudson River Tunnel Project.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, is at home recovering from surgery on her arm.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, fielded a number of member and supporter questions, forwarded voicemails to their appropriate staffer, and worked with Kimberly to get ready for people find tax documents while Jonsie has been out. He also covered the Amtrak Board meeting that took place this week, continued prepping for next month's "fact finding" trip to Toledo, and started working with some of our new volunteer staff members.
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, will be out of the office on vacation from January 30 through February 9. This week she has been working to prepare 2025 tax statements for our constituents. Please note that a system error caused some email notifications to incorrectly reference 2026; however, all contribution dates listed are accurate. This issue has now been corrected. If you need a new tax receipt, you may access it directly through your constituent portal or request one via email.

Apply for Volunteer Staff at Rail Passengers Association



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NEEDED**



RAILPASSENGERS
ASSOCIATION

railpassengers.org/volunteer

Rail Passengers Association

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Membership How-To

Are you a current member and need help with your account number, username, etc.?

[Click Here For Our Membership "How-To" Page](#)

We Have Merch!

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Discuss This
Week's Hotline



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Membership Group



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Take Action

Rail Passengers Timetables



RAIL PASSENGERS
ASSOCIATION

TIMETABLE UPDATE!

railpassengers.org/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](#)

NOTE: Because we do update the links on our website - please bookmark **the main page** and not the individual schedules

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

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!

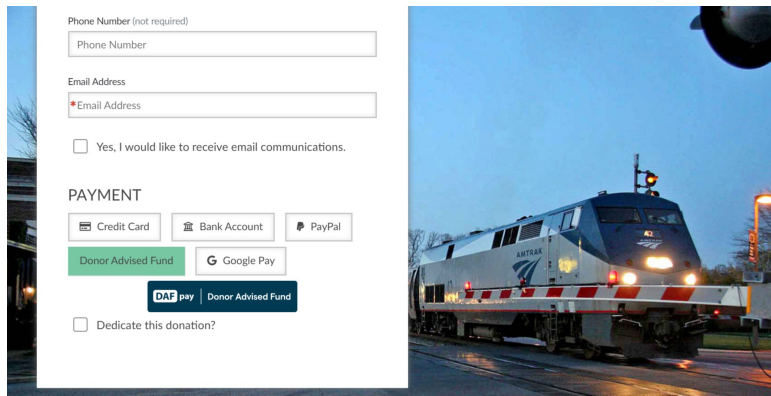
With multiple secure, protected methods of payment, you have more flexibility in the way dues are paid. Skip the hassle and [contact us](#) today for help setting up automatic or online payments.

- 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

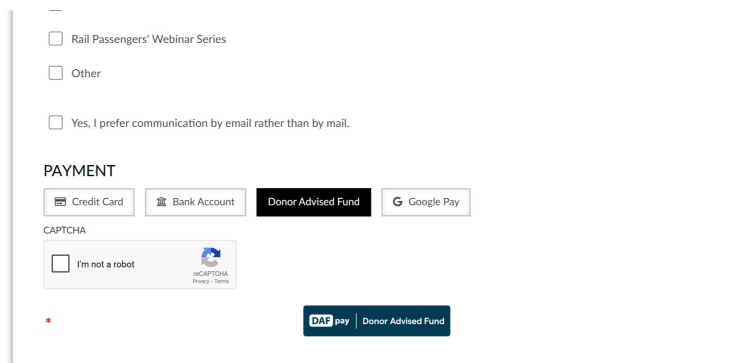
Use Your Donor Advised Fund (DAF) to Donate, Renew or Join Online

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.

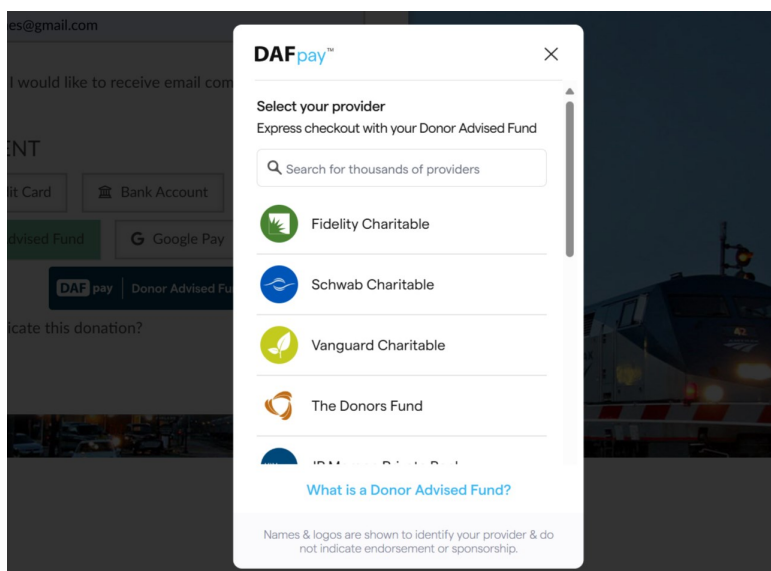
Donation Form:

A screenshot of a web form for donations. On the left is a white form with fields for 'Phone Number (not required)', 'Email Address', and a checkbox for 'Yes, I would like to receive email communications.' Below these is a 'PAYMENT' section with buttons for 'Credit Card', 'Bank Account', 'PayPal', 'Donor Advised Fund' (highlighted in green), and 'Google Pay'. At the bottom of the payment section is a 'DAF pay | Donor Advised Fund' button and a checkbox for 'Dedicate this donation?'. On the right is a photograph of a blue and white Amtrak locomotive at night with its headlights on.

Membership Form:

A screenshot of a web form for membership. It includes checkboxes for 'Rail Passengers' Webinar Series', 'Other', and 'Yes, I prefer communication by email rather than by mail.' Below is a 'PAYMENT' section with buttons for 'Credit Card', 'Bank Account', 'Donor Advised Fund' (highlighted in black), and 'Google Pay'. At the bottom is a 'CAPTCHA' section with a checkbox for 'I'm not a robot' and a CAPTCHA image. A 'DAF pay | Donor Advised Fund' button is at the bottom right.

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.

A screenshot of a mobile app interface for 'DAFpay'. It shows a 'Select your provider' screen with the text 'Express checkout with your Donor Advised Fund'. There is a search bar and a list of providers: Fidelity Charitable, Schwab Charitable, Vanguard Charitable, and The Donors Fund. A link 'What is a Donor Advised Fund?' is at the bottom. A disclaimer at the very bottom states: 'Names & logos are shown to identify your provider & do not indicate endorsement or sponsorship.' The background is a dark image of a train at night.

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

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

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