



Photo Credit: Joe Aiello



FRIDAY HOTLINE

#1434

MARCH 27TH, 2026



Association News

Cautious Optimism on Amtrak Reorganization

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

Earlier this year, I wrote about [a proposal being explored by the Federal Railroad Administration to reorganize Amtrak](#) into three separate subsidiaries. At the time, my reaction was cautious — not because reform is inherently a bad idea (and in this instance is clearly needed), but because structural change without clarity about goals, authorities, and guardrails posed the risk of more uncertainty than progress. But since then, I've had the opportunity to discuss the concept further with senior FRA leadership, and that conversation addressed many of the questions I had raised.

I think it's fair to say I'm now in the camp of "cautiously optimistic."

My caution remains and comes primarily from the elements outside FRA's control. Congressional intent plays a big role. Appropriations realities, too. Political narratives about "privatization" matter, especially when they move faster than the facts. How Amtrak's internally affected constituencies will react also come into play. All of those uncertainties remain.

But my optimism comes from our follow-up discussions, in which I'm more confident than before that what FRA is examining really isn't a back-door attempt to dismantle the national passenger rail system, as some online rail supporters have feared. Instead, it appears to be an effort to think seriously about how Amtrak's structure can better support the service expansion Congress has already directed it to deliver.

What's even more important, at least to us at the Association, is what seems to be genuine willingness to consider the tough questions as the goals for each of the three proposed subsidiaries are put together. These goals -- or "key performance indicators," KPIs, in the vernacular -- should be tied directly to what the taxpayers and fare-paying passengers expect the new units to accomplish, and I was particularly reassured to learn that the intent is to develop KPIs with this in mind...and to allow stakeholders to contribute to that development.

[READ MORE](#)

Take Me Out to the Train Yard

[By Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement + Organizing](#)

"Baseball is a lot like life. It's a day-to-day existence, full of ups and downs."
- Ernie Harwell

If you asked me for a list of things that are part of the true essence of this country, in all honesty, trains and baseball would be pretty damn high on the list. Not only that, but **the two are forever linked** in our history (just ask the Baseball Hall of Fame).

It was because of that history, back in 2018, our Summer By Rail tour was all about America's Pastime (one of the first major projects I was directly involved in after I was hired).

And it's not just trains, but public transit in general. Look at the number of accessible stadiums in the league - Target Field (Minneapolis), Yankee Stadium and Citi Field (NY), Wrigley Field and Rate Field (Chicago), Fenway

Park (Boston), Chase Field (Phoenix), T-Mobile (Seattle)... just to name a few. And that doesn't include the countless minor league fields that you can get to by train.

Alright, Joe. Baseball. Trains. A trip nearly a decade ago. Where are you going with this?

Good question, random reader.

BUT FIRST!

A quick personal history side note....



Welcome to Armour Square on Chicago's Southside. My old hood. The big blue circle was the site of the original Comiskey Park (aka the "[Baseball Palace of the World](#)"), a building where Pope Leo and I have seen many ballgames together. That small red circle, a block and half away, is the house I grew up in. The city park in-between is where I played tee-ball, various sports with friends, went to day camp, and never once got caught causing trouble as a teenager.

And as any lifelong and long-suffering White Sox fan will tell you, I [absolutely despise our owner](#).

Which then brings me to the actual topic I want to write about this week.

Based on the number of social media comments, emails, and phone calls I have received in the past week - I am sure that most of you reading this [have heard the news](#): the future (not current) owner of the Sox is in discussions, through his private equity firm, to purchase Amtrak's 47-acre 14th Street rail yard. At the same time, Amtrak has been in discussions to leave their current spot and build a brand-new facility at Union Pacific's Canal Yards.

[READ MORE](#)

Rail Passengers Issues Transportation Funding Request for FY27

As Congress prepares to take up spending bills for the upcoming year, Rail Passengers Association is calling on Congress to fund rail programs at the levels authorized in the expiring surface transportation law.

Congressional committees are currently drafting the bill that will succeed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), a historic piece of legislation that sought to close the investment gap for America's passenger rail system. Until this the new law is enacted, *Rail Passengers* believes it is critical for Congressional appropriators to continue supporting these programs.

[Want to learn more? [Join us for our March 30th webinar](#) where we'll discuss next month's week of advocacy for passenger rail.]

These IIJA-funded upgrades to the U.S. rail network are even more important in light of the recent energy shock, which has underscored the vulnerability of American families and the economy to volatile oil prices. Passenger rail and transit are extremely energy efficient forms of transportation, moving people using significantly less energy per passenger mile than automobiles or airplanes. Expand access to trains gives travelers an affordable, energy efficient alternative; helps reduce exposure to fuel price spikes; and strengthens national energy security.

[READ MORE](#)

Making Environmental Review Work for Passenger Rail

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

The Surface Transportation Board is proposing something that sounds technical but could have very real consequences for how quickly passenger rail projects move from plans to reality: modernizing its environmental review procedures under the National Environmental Policy Act.

That may not sound like headline news. And, at 69 pages, the STB's Notice of Proposed Rulemaking isn't exactly a brisk read. But trust me when I say it matters more than most people realize. Because right now, we sometimes find ourselves in the strange position of delaying projects designed to reduce pollution long enough that the delay itself produces even more pollution. Unlike highways and airports, most intercity passenger rail projects will find themselves in front of the Surface Transportation Board in some fashion before construction can begin, which makes the Board's environmental review procedures especially important to whether projects move forward on schedule.

Passenger rail is one of the clearest examples. Every time a corridor upgrade gets pushed back by years — or even decades — cars stay on the road longer. Flights that could have shifted to rail keep operating. Communities continue living with congestion and emissions that modern rail service could have reduced. Environmental review is supposed to help us make better decisions about infrastructure. It's not supposed to postpone the benefits of better infrastructure indefinitely.

That's the paradox the Board is trying to address in its proposed updates. [\(You can read the entire proposal by clicking here.\)](#) The changes reflect recent statutory revisions to NEPA and [court decisions clarifying how agencies should focus environmental analysis](#), but if all that makes your head spin, just remember their practical effect is simpler: clearer timelines, more predictable review steps, and a tighter focus on environmental effects that are actually relevant to the decision at hand.

STB has the docket open for comments on this potential rulemaking, and we've filed ours broadly in support of what they're proposing. [\(Read our comments in the docket by clicking here.\)](#)

[READ MORE](#)

2026 Leadership Election Process Begins

As a member of the Rail Passengers Association, you have more than just a seat on the train - you have a seat at the table. With 2026 shaping up to be another landmark year for passenger rail, there's never been a better time to help steer our organization's future.

We are now accepting nominations for dedicated members to step into leadership roles. If you're ready to advocate for the future of rail, we invite you to submit a **Candidate Information Statement (CIS)** for the following positions:

- [Board of Directors](#): Serve as an Officer or Director to manage the Association's high-level strategy.
- [Council of Representatives \(At-Large\)](#): Join our nationwide body of volunteer advocates.
- [Membership Action Review Committee \(MARC\)](#): Help oversee internal member processes.

CLICK ON THE ABOVE LINKS TO BE TAKEN TO THE CIS FORM FOR THAT POSITION

NOTICE: General membership is allowed to run for Board Director and the At-Large Council seats. You must be a sitting member of the Board or Council to apply for Board Officer. MARC members must be a member of the Council.

THE DEADLINE TO FILE A CIS FOR THE UPCOMING ELECTION IS MIDNIGHT EASTERN ON MONDAY, APRIL 6TH

The elections will take place during our **Spring Council Business Meeting on April 22nd**. Candidates will have the opportunity to introduce themselves and give a brief presentation before the vote.

Ten At-Large Council Representative seats, carrying two-year terms, and five MARC positions, carrying one-year terms, will be determined by in-person voting during the meeting. The nine Board Director and Officer positions - serving three-year and two-year terms, respectively - will be decided via an online ballot following the close of the business session.

- [Learn about the Council of Representatives](#)
- [Learn about the Board of Directors](#)
- [Review the Association's Governing Documents](#)

Amtrak Pro-Tip: If you have companion coupons, or Amtrak Guest Rewards 10 percent discount coupons, or something similar to use the next time you book a trip, for the time being you might be better off calling Amtrak Guest Rewards directly to apply the coupon and finish booking your trip. That's because the program rules say that you must apply coupons at the time of booking -- but lately both the Amtrak app and the Amtrak website are struggling with getting coupons applied to transactions. Sometimes it's not even offering the passenger an opportunity during the booking process to enter the coupon code. It's a known issue, and they're working on it, but the Call Center advised me this week that you'll always be able to use the coupons if you call them directly at 1-800-307-5000.

Please email [Joe Aiello](mailto:Joe.Aiello@amtrak.com) 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 us @ hotline@narprrail.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!

[Chicago Transit Authority lawsuit targets federal construction funding halted last fall, AP News](#)

Stop us if you have heard this before... the Trump Administration is being sued to resume already allocated funding for transportation projects that they froze last fall.

This time its Chicago's CTA.

[Amtrak shifts Empire Builder onboard staffing to Chicago, King 5](#)

Seattle may be getting a brand-new maintenance facility and the first crack at the Airo fleet, but they are losing the Empire Builder crew base.

[Emergency transit drill planned in downtown Fort Worth ahead of World Cup, Fort Worth Report](#)

Multiple agencies in the DFW area will be taking part in a transportation focused safety drill as the city gets ready to host the World Cup this summer.

['There's no stopping' central Ohio passenger rail, former U.S. transportation secretary says, Columbus Dispatch](#)

Former Congressman and Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood spoke at a Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission event last week on the inevitability of expanded passenger rail service in the Buckeye State.

[Trump weighs moving Madison Square Garden for Penn Station rebuild, sources say, Gothamist](#)

If Knicks and Rangers owner James Dolan would come to the table for talks, a plan floated by a number of "connected supporters" last fall to President Trump could be of interest to the Administration.

[NYMTA to Make Largest Ever Investment in Subway Cars, APTA News Center](#)

The country's third-oldest transit agency (ninth oldest in the world) is about to make the largest rolling stock investment in its 122-year history.

[Curious about plans for passenger rail in Colorado? Town halls set, Coloradoan](#)

The Front Range Passenger Rail District will be hosting a town hall on Monday, March 30th in Fort Collins to give updates on the proposed passenger rail corridor (Denver and Colorado Springs events are

upcoming).

[Two rail projects in Juniata County move forward](#), **The Sentinel**

As part of the larger plan for expanded Pennsylvanian service between NYC and Pittsburgh, two capacity-focused infrastructure projects are getting closer to getting started thanks to local support in Juniata County (PA).

[STB to Metra, UP: Keep Talking](#), **Railfan & Railroad Magazine**

The STB is telling UP and Metra to kiss and make up instead of getting a federal regulator involved in their ongoing track access dispute.

[Governor Sherrill Signs Executive Order to Improve NJ TRANSIT Rider Experience](#), **Office of the Governor**

Earlier this week New Jersey Governor Mikie Sherrill signed a NJTransit-centric executive order that focuses on the passenger experience that includes safety, accessibility, and equipment cleanliness

[Commuter train fires prompt NTSB safety alert](#), **Progressive Railroading**

According to a new NTSB report, new tech and legacy systems don't always play well together

[With Atlanta airport security wait times stretching to 4 or more hours, here's what alternate travel plans could look like](#), **11 Alive**

Flying is a nightmare at the moment, but (like the examples for ATL in this article) there are options out there.



**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



[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.**

NOTE: THE NORTHEAST/SOUTH AND MIDWEST/MID-ATLANTIC WORKSHOPS ARE NOW FULL.

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

April 22nd, 2026
Open Gov Hub
1100 13th Street NW, Suite 800

[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.

Local Meetings + Events

[22nd Annual Southwestern Rail Conference](#), May 18-19

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**, continued work on liability reforms for commuter rail, analyzed and filed comments on an STB proposal to change how environmental regulations are applied to rail projects, met with coalition partners as we continue to assess how the proposed UP-NS transaction might hurt passenger rail, and took part in meetings with Amtrak leaders on customer-service issues, including setting up connections between Amtrak's customer-service team and the Association's new Consumer Affairs advocacy team.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, is working with Rail Passengers Association members and our Council of Representatives to get ready for this year's week of advocacy in Washington, DC.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, processed membership dues and donations sent to the DC office, prepared for our Toledo site visit next week, prepared April solicitations, worked with CharityEngine on upcoming enhancements, and tended to the Association's administrative and operational needs.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, wrote down some thoughts on the recent Amtrak/White Sox news out of Chicago from last week, assisted Sean with our first Advocacy Week briefing, updated our Hill meeting reporting form, and joined some of our new volunteer staffers on an outreach call.
- **John Christoph, Chief Data Scientist & Research/Analysis Lead**, worked with our volunteers to increase the granularity of our ridership model. We can now look at the geographic distribution of populations within counties at the Census Tract level, to measure how differently passengers use the train depending on how dispersed or concentrated its residents are. We plan to use this data to identify hot locations where Amtrak has an outsized impact on the local community, for potential future RPA initiatives.

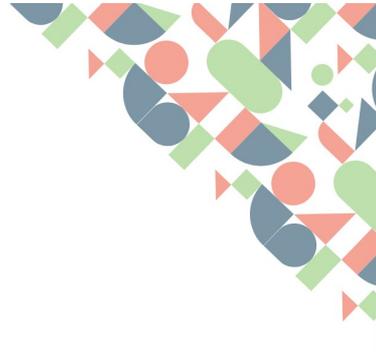
Also, John and Tasos, RPA's new grant writing specialist, got to thank WMATA CEO Randy Clark for getting our DC office staff to work every

day, at Metro's 50th Anniversary Celebration

- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, continues to work closely with our constituents on membership renewals, new memberships, troubleshooting access to the User Center, password resets, and adding additional sub-memberships for those who qualify for that benefit.

Apply for Volunteer Staff at Rail Passengers Association

**VOLUNTEERS
NEEDED**



railpassengers.org/volunteer

Rail Passengers Association

[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE!](#)

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](#)

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

[Click here](#) for instructions.

We Have Merch!

New items available!



 Visit our Store

 Discuss This Week's Hotline

 Service Updates & Timetables

 Visit the General Membership Group

 View Webinars

 Rail Passengers' Social Media

 **Take Action**

Rail Passengers Timetables



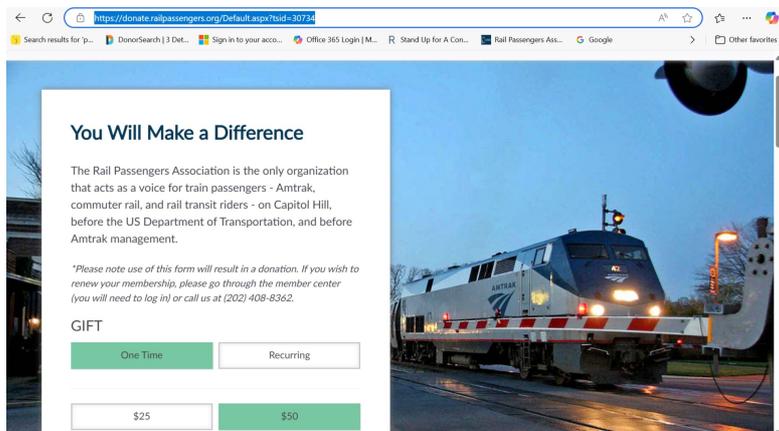
Our Timetables Manager, Chris Jukins, has created a spring update for us. He is still working on a few stragglers, but we should have those up soon.

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>



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
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- Gift of Membership
- and More!

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

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

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

You can now donate or join/renew your membership, online, through your donor advised fund using DAFpay. All Rail Passengers forms now include a "Donor Advised Fund" button under Payment.

Donation Form:

Phone Number (not required)
Phone Number

Email Address
Email Address

Yes, I would like to receive email communications.

PAYMENT

Credit Card Bank Account PayPal

Donor Advised Fund Google Pay

DAF pay | Donor Advised Fund

Dedicate this donation?

Membership Form:

Rail Passengers' Webinar Series

Other

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

PAYMENT

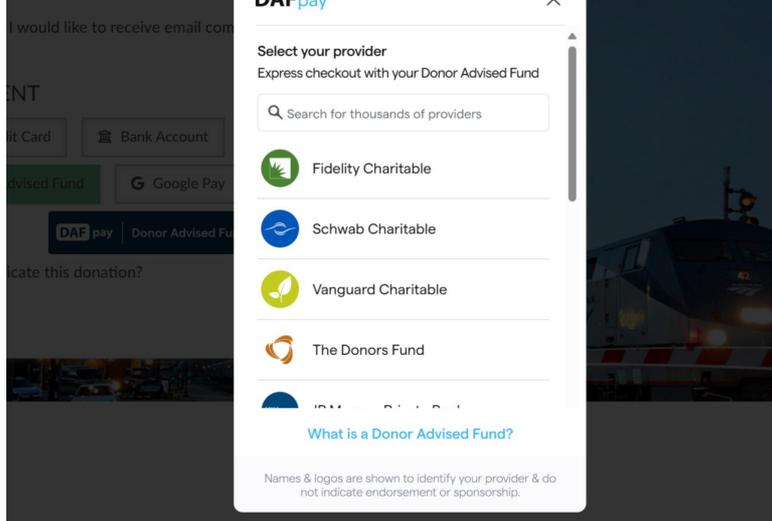
Credit Card Bank Account Donor Advised Fund Google Pay

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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.

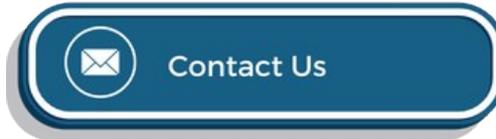
Rail Passengers Association Earns Coveted 4-Star Rating from Charity Navigator

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](#).

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS:



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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