



RAIL PASSENGERS
ASSOCIATION

FRIDAY HOTLINE

#1441

MAY 29TH, 2026



Association News

House THUD Subcommittee Unveils Big Cuts for Rail

By Sean Jeans-Gail / VP of Gov't Affairs + Policy

While many of the eyes in the transportation world were focused on the introduction of BUILD America 250 Act, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development (THUD) quickly advanced its [FY 2027 spending bill on a partyline vote](#), teeing up consideration by the full committee in June.

What it does for passenger rail:

- **Sharp funding cuts overall:** The bill provides about **\$3.1 billion for passenger and freight rail**, far below FY 2026 levels and representing a major reduction in federal rail investment.
- **Amtrak funding reduced heavily:** Direct Amtrak funding would fall to roughly **\$2.1 billion—a 69% cut when factoring in advanced appropriations from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs (IIJA) Act. That includes:**
 - \$1.5 billion for the National Network, and
 - \$650 million for the Northeast Corridor.
- **Zeroes key passenger rail expansion programs:** The bill **cuts off new funding for the Federal State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail (FSP) program**, a major source for corridor expansion and upgrades.
- **Rescinds prior rail funding:** It also rescinds **\$5.1 billion in FSP funds** approved by the IIJA, redirecting them to fund Amtrak operations, other capital grant programs, and other purposes (including the rehabilitation and repair of Washington Union Station).
- **Cuts grant and safety programs:** Programs like CRISI and gradecrossing improvements are reduced by roughly half or more, limiting infrastructure and safety upgrades.

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Surface Transportation Board Freezes UP-NS Case After Accepting Filing

By Jim Mathews / President & CEO

The Surface Transportation Board today formally accepted Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern's revised merger application — but only in the narrowest procedural sense imaginable.

And honestly? The decision reads less like a green light than a gentle, but unmistakable, warning shot.

The Board repeatedly emphasizes that “completeness” is not the same thing as demonstrating that the merger is actually in the public interest. In fact, the STB immediately froze the proceeding after accepting the filing, ordered a new round of supplemental information from the railroads, and made clear that major parts of the application remain “unclear or underdeveloped.”

“Although Applicants have included sufficient information to satisfy the fairly narrow procedural question of completeness, there are several aspects of the Revised Application that are unclear or underdeveloped and require supplementation at this stage of the proceeding so that the Board may have the information necessary to thoroughly evaluate — and the public has an adequate opportunity to comment on — whether the Transaction is in the public interest,” [the Board said in its latest decision in the case, Decision No. 21.](#)

So, as part of its decision accepting the application, STB said it would hold the rest of the proceeding in abeyance while it waits for UP and NS to respond to a very detailed list of supplementary inquiries the Board itself posed in the decision. It’s putting everything on hold until at least July 27 to give UP and NS time to respond.

The Board also specifically warned that it would not launch a procedural schedule that “places undue burden on commenting parties to ascertain and evaluate important information about the Transaction and how it corresponds to the new framework.” In plain English: I think STB is signaling that Applicants, not outside parties like Class Is, shippers, or public representatives like us, bear the burden of proving this merger satisfies the much tougher post-2001 merger standards.

The tone throughout the decision reflects exactly that “show me” skepticism, [a skepticism we offered at the outset last year.](#)

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A Look at the Controversy Brewing over the BUILD America 250 Act, Amtrak, Eminent Domain, Transit Oriented Development, and New York Penn Station

By Sean Jeans-Gail / VP of Gov't Affairs

While most of the energy surrounding the BUILD America 250 Act’s approach to passenger rail has (rightfully) focused on the [precipitous downgrade in dedicated funding](#), there’s been an interesting drama developing in the periphery around an amendment to Amtrak’s ability to use Transit Oriented Development (TOD) to generate revenue.

The [Nationally Significant Rail Station Modernization Act of 2026](#) was introduced by Rep. Addison McDowell (R-NC-06) as an amendment during the House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure’s markup of the BUILD America 250 Act. The amendment—which was adopted—would enhance Amtrak’s eminent domain powers and allow it to capture value from nearby real estate development which benefits from proximity to Amtrak stations.

Specifically, the amendment:

- Enhances Amtrak’s eminent domain powers by expanding the definition of “property necessary for intercity rail passenger transportation” to include:
 - Station expansion, reconstruction, or modernization; or
 - Transit-oriented development, including revenue-generating commercial, office, retail, mixed-use, or ancillary development.
- Authorizes Amtrak to “own, lease, license, develop, ground-lease, or enter into joint development or other public-private partnership arrangements” for property located on or adjacent to its stations.
- Authorizes Amtrak to use revenues derived from these activities for “capital improvements, maintenance, debt service, or other costs related to stations and intercity passenger rail facilities”.
- Prohibits state, local and regional governments from collecting taxes or fees on real property owned by Amtrak (alone or in partnership with others), or on improvements made to these properties.
- Authorizes Amtrak to enter into agreements requiring payments in lieu of taxes from entities occupying, leasing, or developing property owned by Amtrak, so long as Amtrak remits funds to state and local governments estimated to be equal to the taxes they would have received prior to any development or improvement of the property.
- Expands categorical exclusions and the streamlining of environmental and local review to Amtrak-led TOD.

“Amtrak can receive contractual payments from developers, this allows Amtrak to retain the revenues created from the increased value of the developed property and then pour that money back into capital improvements, maintenance, and related passenger facilities,” [said Rep. McDowell during the markup.](#) “This amendment does not raise federal

taxes[, and] it does not require new mandatory spending.”

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Mardi Gras to Jacksonville? A Second Crescent? Nope

By Jim Mathews / President & CEO

We all have things we deeply, desperately want to be true. But in a world in which the unscrupulous, the deceptive, or simply the naïve have access to AI-driven creation tools, the risks that come from passing along things that just *feel* so *right*...can be pretty wrong.


Unfortunately, there's a lot of that going on in passenger rail. I can't tell you how many times in a typical week I get an email from a donor or supporter letting me know about some really fantastic development that I really should say something about.

Trouble is, 99.99 percent of the time, it just ain't so.

One came to me last week breathlessly claiming that Amtrak was already running a new train called the Mountaineer (!) extending Gulf Coast service (currently between New Orleans and Mobile) to Jacksonville, along with a second daily Crescent between New York City and New Orleans.


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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 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!

[Amtrak train fire near Penn Station causes commuter chaos during rush hour for LIRR, NJ Transit](#), ABC 7 NY

More and more issues arise when dealing with infrastructure that is over a century old, and more than just the trains are suffering.

[The U.S. campaigned to host the World Cup. Now soccer fans will trade their countries' train system for the U.S.'s 'D' rated infrastructure](#), Fortune

The upcoming World Cup is about to put America's infrastructure to the ultimate test. As millions of soccer fans descend on the US, many will be trading high-speed, reliable public transit for a system that relies heavily on gridlocked highways and fragmented commuter rail.

[ESPN presents 'Last Train to North America,' a new documentary series following North America's road to the 2026 World Cup](#), ESPN Press Room

Catch ESPN's docuseries "Last Train to North America" as soccer reporter and commentator Martin Ainstein takes a cross-continental rail journey through the US, Mexico, and Canada ahead of the World Cup.

[Congress, White House All Talk, No Action on Passenger Trains](#), ELPC

Environmental Law & Policy Center Senior Policy Advocate and friend of the Association, Derrick James, shares the Center's take on the draft BUILD America 250 Act

[Bill to end Amtrak arbitration requirement is reintroduced](#), Trains Pro

Sen. Blumenthal (D-CT) and Reps. Chris Deluzio (PA-17) & Brendan Boyle (PA-02) have introduced versions of the "Ending Passenger Rail Forced Arbitration Act," which aims to end the policy that was started in 2019. (Note: the Association supports this bill)

[America Keeps Building Stadiums Like Transit Doesn't Matter](#), Streetsblog USA

Slapping a "transit-first" label on a project doesn't work if thousands of people are forced into a single choke point.

[Could Amtrak chug into Madison by the end of the decade? Here are the latest plans.](#), Wisconsin Public Radio

While funding is ALWAYS the main issue, "sconnies" are getting behind the Hiawatha West plan and bringing passenger rail back to downtown Madison.

[Trinity Metro's TEXRail getting an extension; construction starting this year](#), Dallas News

While the DART system is currently seeing issues arising from some of the cities it serves, Trinity Metro's TEXRail is about to break ground on a 2.1-mile extension

[Amtrak Celebrates One Million Customer Trips on NextGen Acela](#), Amtrak

In the 9 months since their official launch, the NextGen Acela fleet has hit the 1M customer trip milestone. It took the original Acela's a little over a year to hit that mark.

[What the heck is a LIRR? New Yorkers scoff at LIRR pronunciation debate](#), NY Post

Now that the worker strike is in the rearview, we can get to the heart of more important issues - how do you refer to the Long Island Rail Road?

[Amtrak Fails To Regain Metro-North Rail Access After Lawsuit](#),

ICYMI: A federal judge on Friday rejected Amtrak's injunction bid to use Metro-North's Hudson and New Haven lines for non-revenue train moves.

[New Rock Island Line schedule takes effect June 1, Metra](#)

Riders on Metra's Rock Island route between Chicago and Joliet will have more options to get around the city and south suburbs starting next Monday, thanks to expanded evening and weekend service.

[New York faces chaos as Knicks in NBA Finals clashes with FIFA World Cup, The Mirror US](#)

There has been a lot of talk about the chaos the World Cup will cause for riders in host cities across the country. Now, thanks to the Knicks returning to the NBA Finals for the first time since '99, things at MSG could be VERY interesting next month.

[Wheels welcome on board, but know the rules, CT Mirror](#)

Taking your bike around "The Nutmeg State"? Read up on the different rules for the various public transportation modes.



**WE ARE WORKING ON A DISCORD SERVER.
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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

Association Events



[Click Here For The RailNation Website](#)

Local Meetings + Events

[Greater Northwest Rail Summit](#), August 25-27

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!

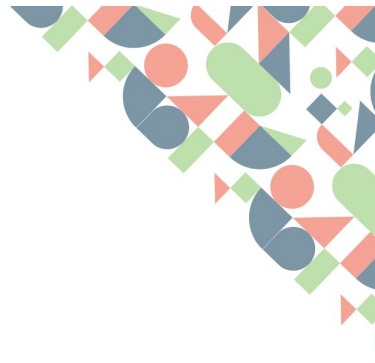
- **Jim Mathews, President & CEO**, spent much of this week digging into the Surface Transportation Board's latest decision in the continuing effort by Union Pacific to buy Norfolk Southern, and working with coalition partners as we keep developing our litigation strategy in this proceeding. That is, when he wasn't reviewing the voting records on each of the

House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee's 40-plus amendments to their proposed BUILD America 250 replacement for the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, was kept busy with the surface transportation reauthorization and annual appropriations.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, had a busy week supporting requests from auditors while FY2025 field work was taking place, processed membership dues and donations sent directly to the DC office, worked on several RailNation: Toledo taskers as the team continues production planning, readied for the arrival of the Summer interns next week, and tended to the administrative and operational needs of the Association.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, spoke with several fellow advocates this week regarding our fall meeting, continued hammering out more details for the event, and spent time talking to some of our partners on various policy topics.
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, continues to support the organization's membership needs and is working on improving future membership opportunities.

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Rail Passengers Association

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 Service Updates & Timetables

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 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.

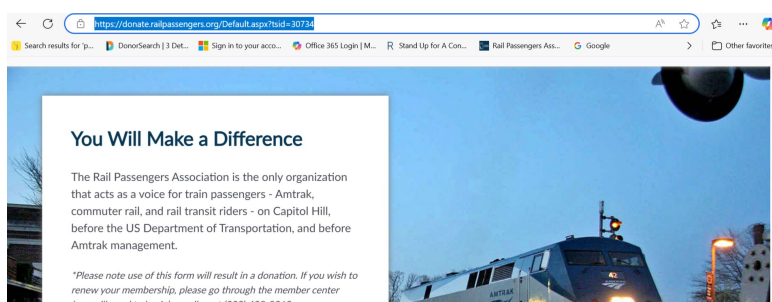
[CLICK HERE](#)

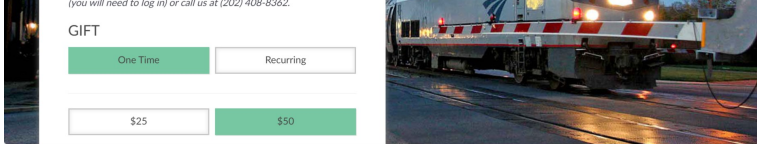
NOTE: Because we do update the links on our website - please bookmark **the main page** and not the individual schedules

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>





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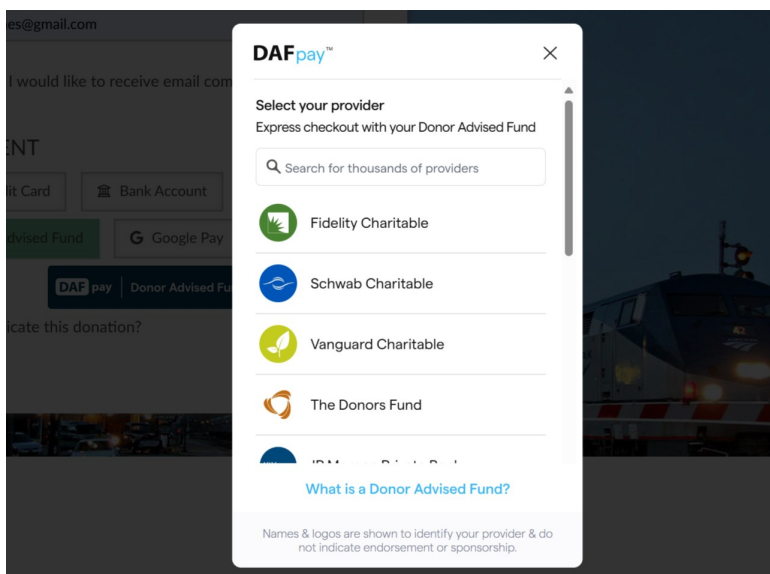
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You can now donate or join/renew your membership, online, through your donor advised fund using DAFpay. All Rail Passengers forms now include a "Donor Advised Fund" button under Payment.

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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.



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Charity 
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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.

2026

Rail Passengers Association Earns 3-Star Rating from Charity Navigator

Rail Passengers Association's strong financial health and commitment to accountability and transparency have earned it a 3-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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