

Photo credit: Jeff Pletcher



FRIDAY HOTLINE

#1413

OCTOBER 10TH, 2025



NOTE: The Rail Passengers office will be closed Monday, October 13th in observation of the Indigenous Peoples'/Columbus Day holiday



Take Action

NOTE: Our office has been getting a number of questions as of late about our printed "Passengers Voice" newsletter. We, unfortunately, stopped production in the Spring of 2020 and, as of this notice, do not have plans to start up again.

Association News

USDOT Funding Freeze for Rail Mega-Projects Drags On

by Sean Jeans-Gail, VP of Gov't Affairs + Policy

The Trump Administration's freeze of federal funds for rail projects in Democratic-led cities and states continued this week, increasing uncertainty for the contractors, workers, and transit agencies. However, the agencies have promised to keep the work moving, expressing optimism that a resolution can be reached in time to avoid any meaningful disruptions.

On October 3rd, the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) [announced a freeze](#) on the disbursement of \$2.1 billion in federal funding designated for two projects—the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) Red Line Extension and the CTA Red and Purple Modernization Program. The USDOT stated that the funding freeze will allow it to review how the DBE is implementing the federal Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) program.

This follows on the heels of an October 1st announcement that the USDOT [would freeze funding disbursements for two megaprojects in New York](#)—the 2nd Avenue Subway and new Hudson River Tunnel—to review how the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and the Gateway Development Commission are implementing the DBE. Together, these two projects represent a combined \$18 billion in allocated federal funding.

The USDOT was unusually explicit in drawing a connection between the funding freeze and the political disagreement driving the government shutdown, laying blame at the feet of Democratic leaders from New York.

"Thanks to the Chuck Schumer and Hakeem Jeffries shutdown, however, USDOT's review of New York's unconstitutional practices will take more time. Without a budget, the Department has been forced to furlough the civil rights staff responsible for conducting this review," said Secretary Sean Duffy [in a press release announcing the freeze](#). "This is another unfortunate casualty of radical Democrats' reckless decision to hold the federal government hostage to give illegal immigrants benefits."

In an interview this week with CNBC, Sec. Duffy did make a point to say that President Trump is not against the projects, per se, instead framing the freeze as an issue of fairness.

“These are the largest projects in the Western Hemisphere, they’re massive, and we have constitutional rules on disadvantaged businesses and how you give that money out... you can’t base it on race and sex,” he told the reporter.

The program at the center of the USDOT’s inquiry aims to ensure fair participation of minority- and women-owned businesses in federally funded transportation projects. It is also an unlikely flashpoint, given its history. Congress first enacted the DBE in 1983, and it has been largely uncontroversial during the life of the program. Successive Congresses have reauthorized it in every subsequent surface and aviation authorization in the intervening 42 years.

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

Are Trains and Transit Really More Dangerous? The Data Say No

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

Every few weeks, someone tells me that we live in more dangerous times than ever before — that we need more surveillance, more armed police officers, even military troops in train stations. I even hear sometimes from some folks that Amtrak trains aren’t safe because we don’t go through airport-style security to board them, or that we should post armed marshals on every train.

I understand where that sentiment comes from. Between 24-hour news coverage, social media’s algorithm-driven outrage, and the trauma of past attacks, danger can feel more present than ever. But feelings aren’t the same as facts. When we look at long-term data, the evidence is overwhelming: we are not living in more dangerous times. In fact, by many measures, we’re safer than ever.

Over the past three decades, [violent crime in the United States has dropped by nearly half](#), with huge drops in things like robbery (down 74 percent), aggravated assault (down 39 percent), and murder (down 34 percent). FBI data show that [murders fell nearly 15 percent in 2024 alone](#), and violent crime overall was down about four and a half percent from the prior year.

When it comes to transportation, passenger rail is among the safest modes of travel in America. On a per-mile basis, riding a train is roughly 15 to 25 times safer than driving a car, [with about 0.43 fatalities per billion passenger-miles compared with about seven fatalities per billion passenger-miles for cars](#).

Most telling of all? [Nearly all rail-related deaths have nothing to do with crime or terrorism](#). They occur at grade crossings, or involve trespassing on tracks — tragedies, yes, but not the kind of onboard violence that critics imagine or that some people, especially first-time riders, fear. That 0.43 fatalities I just cited includes a lot of people who aren’t actually riding on trains. Once you exclude pedestrian deaths, deaths from car-versus-train, and suicides, the fatality rate is even more dramatically lower — [only 0.15 deaths per billion passenger-miles](#).

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

Rail Passengers on Fink's Confirmation to Head FRA

Rail Passengers Association President & CEO Jim Mathews issued the following statement on the U.S. Senate’s confirmation of David Fink as Administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration:

“We congratulate Administrator Fink for his confirmation and stand ready to work with him in ensuring the safe and reliable movement of passengers and freight across the U.S. rail network.

“Administrator Fink brings a wealth of knowledge to his position, having headed a freight railroad that also served as host for Amtrak service. We believe that having first-hand experience in balancing the needs of these two categories of operations will be a valuable resource to the FRA, the agency charged with administering the expansion of America’s passenger rail network, funded by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.”

Rail Passengers [urged Congress to speedily confirm Mr. Fink](#) to the agency following his nomination hearing in May of this year.

Progress, Promise, and a Little Soap and Water

When I sat down with Amtrak President Roger Harris last weekend for what was billed as a “fireside chat” at our RailNation: San Antonio Fall conference, I half expected a comfy sofa and a cup of coffee. Alas, both were in short supply and the weather was a decidedly un-autumn-like 96 degrees.

But instead, I got something even better — [a wide-ranging, candid conversation with a new Amtrak leader](#) trying to be more visible and more engaged than ever before.

Roger came ready to talk about what’s working, what’s new, and where Amtrak still has work to do. And as I told him at the outset, it’s a great time to be Amtrak, but also a time when the company has to show that it can deliver consistently, every day, for passengers.

We began with the obvious: Amtrak’s long-awaited wave of new trains is finally becoming reality. I mentioned that between the new Mardi Gras service, the Borealis, and the long-anticipated Next Generation Acela, it really does feel as though decades of advocacy are finally paying off.

Roger agreed, and shared his excitement about [the new Acela fleet beginning to enter service in the Northeast Corridor](#). He and I both rode the VIP inaugural run to Boston a few weeks ago from DC Union Station, and I have to say I thought it was a beautiful trainset. It’s the fifth generation of the French TGV — but, as he pointed out with some pride, “these trains aren’t even in service in France yet.”

The Next Gen Acelas are faster, more comfortable, and built with the latest Tier III safety standards — the culmination of years of regulatory work by Amtrak, FRA, and advocates (including yours truly, who remembers sitting through what felt like centuries of technical committee meetings during the Federal Railroad Administration’s Rail Safety Advisory Committee work sessions to hammer out Tier III).



Meanwhile, the Airo program is reshaping expectations across the rest of the country. These aren’t just new trainsets, but instead they’re part of an entire program of new maintenance facilities, new manufacturing partnerships, and new jobs.

Roger said that six new facilities — in Seattle, Boston, Washington, [Philadelphia](#), Albany, and one more on the East Coast — are already under construction, each costing between \$250 million and \$500 million. “They’re on time and on budget,” he told the audience, “and they’re going to transform the customer experience.”

He sees these trains as more than hardware: they’re catalysts to rebuild a sustainable American rail-supply base, which is something we lost decades ago when companies like Pullman and Budd went under. “We need predictability,” I observed, “so the people who build these trains know the next order is coming.”

[\[CLICK HERE TO READ MORE ABOUT THE "FIRESIDE CHAT"\]](#)

Field Notes

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)?

Please email [Joe Aiello](mailto:jaiello@narprrail.org) if you have any local, state or regional stories/projects that you would like to write about and see 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!

['Huge opportunity': Transit leaders keep up push for S.A-to-Austin rail](#), San Antonio Express News

"How can we re-rail Texas?" - Caroline Mays, TxDOT

San Antonio Express-News' Richard Webner stopped by RailNation on Saturday to check out the conference and hear from some of the biggest passenger rail advocates in the US.

[Norfolk Southern promises to speed up Crescent line running through Charlottesville](#), Daily Progress

Rail Passengers Chairwoman Meredith Richards spoke with The Daily Progress' Hawes Spencer on the "highest priority" agreement struck between Amtrak and Norfolk Southern back in September and what it will mean for passengers in the Commonwealth.

[Trump Fires Black Officials From an Overwhelmingly White Administration](#), NYT

Dismissed in August by the Trump Administration, after being appointed by that same leadership in 2021, former STB Chair Robert Primus is taking to the courts to remain on the independent committee

[U.S. Senate confirms David Fink as next FRA administrator](#), Mass Transit

The Senate has confirmed former CEO of Pan Am Railway David Fink as the new head of the FRA - taking 45 years of experience and stepping in at a pivotal moment for train service across the US.

[President Trump pauses \\$2.1B for Chicago infrastructure projects, affecting CTA Red Line extension](#), ABC 7 Chicago

Last Thursday, we covered the news that the Trump Administration was withholding federal funds from NYC for two critical projects - now, Chicago is under the same spotlight.

[Amtrak cleans up in Chicago](#), Trains Pro

Clean (YAY!), but delayed (OH COME ON!) trains out of Chicago this week.

[Passenger rail cars built in Lexington on 'Coolest Thing Made in NC' list](#), Charlotte Observer

We have to agree - building a new fleet of passenger rail cars in a \$220M high-tech facility is pretty damn cool

[Portland considering new location for Amtrak Downeaster station](#), WMTW

Anyone who has even traveled on the Downeaster to and from Portland, ME knows all too well of the lost travel time due to the pull forward/back out/reverse/around the bend moves the train needs to get to the station. That could be changing...

[Virginia Railway Express Reaches 100 Million Rider Milestone](#), Woodbridge, VA Patch

33 years & 100 million riders. Congrats to our friends at VRE for crossing this historic milestone. Here's to the next 100M.



**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!

Upcoming Events

[Build Northwest Economic Forum & Pacific Northwest Rail Summit](#) - October 14-17

[RIARP Annual Elections and Fall Meeting](#) - Monday, October 20

[WisARP Fall 2025 General Membership Meeting](#) - Saturday, October 25

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!

RailNation: San Antonio

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**, recovered (briefly!) from this weekend's RailNation: San Antonio Fall conference, but then returned to efforts in Congress and with allies to address a looming liability insurance crisis that could stop some commuter-rail operators from running their trains by next March or April. He also appeared on the Inside Edition news feature television program to talk about Brightline, pedestrian safety, and how to make new corridors as safe as they can be.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, work with allied organizations, industry stakeholders, the House, and Senate on legislative language, while simultaneously talking with reporters about how the shutdown is affecting rail transportation in the US, and preparing to moderate a panel at next week's [Pacific NorthWest Economic Region \(PNWER\) rail summit](#).
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, worked on future fundraising messages, processed membership dues and donations sent to the DC office, met with an Association partner and tended to the operational/administrative needs of the Association.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, after taking a couple of days off earlier in the week to travel back from San Antonio and celebrate his birthday, Joe has been busy with a number of projects including editing videos from the fall conference and various communications with our volunteer leadership.
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, *will be out of the office for the extended holiday weekend from 10/10 through 10/14*. She continues to support our members by processing lapsed, renewed, and new memberships. Have you ever wondered why you don't receive a password reset email when you request one, there are a few possible reasons. You may have your email communications turned off in your account settings, the message may have been filtered into your spam or junk folder, or you might be using a different email address than the one associated with your account. If you're still having difficulty accessing your account, please don't hesitate to reach out to Kimberly for assistance.

Keep Your Contact Info & Preferences Up to Date

We want to be sure you never miss important updates, membership news, or your transaction receipts! You can easily update your email address, phone number, mailing address, and communication preferences anytime through the CharityEngine Constituent Portal:

<https://membership.railpassengers.org/usercenter> (we recommend bookmarking this link for easy access)

Getting Started

1. Visit the Login page and enter the User Name and Password associated with your CharityEngine account.

Log in

User Name

Password

☒ Remember me

[Forgot password?](#)

LOG IN

2. Once you're logged in, you'll see your account dashboard. Click "Update Your Info."

HomeMy Info & PreferencesReports & Tax StatementsEventsSettings



CONTACT INFO

Name	Tom Train	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Receive Email?
Email		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Receive Phone Calls?
Phone		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Receive Mail?
Address	1200 G St Nw Washington, DC 20005-3814 US	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Receive SMS?

[Update Your Info](#)

Welcome To Your Membership Dashboard

Renew Membership

Donate

Board + Council Directory

Making Updates

On the Edit Contact Info screen, you can:

Update your personal details like email, phone, and address.

Adjust your communication preferences—switch the green "Yes" button to red "No" (or vice versa)

Click **UPDATE** to save your changes.

Home

EDIT CONTACT INFO

First Name

Tom

Middle

Last Name

Train

DOB

MM/DD/YYYY

Email

Phone

(703) 555-5555

Address

1200 G St Nw Washington DC 20005

[Enter Unit Number or Other Details](#)

☒ COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES

☒ Receive Email?

☒ Receive Phone Calls?

☒ Receive Mail?

☒ Receive SMS?

UPDATE

CANCEL

A Quick Tip

Since transaction receipts are sent by email, having your current email address on file will ensure you receive everything without delay.

We Have Merch!

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT
ALL SUMMER LONG!





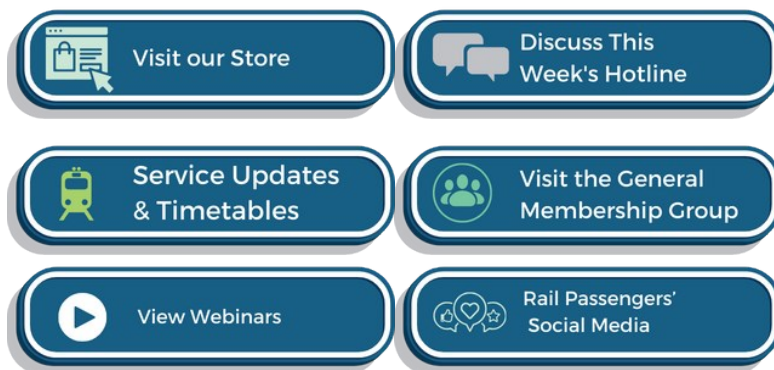


@railpassengers





RAIL PASSENGERS.ORG/STORE



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.

**WE HAVE A FULL SUMMER UPDATE,
INCLUDING THE NEW *MARDI GRAS* SERVICE**

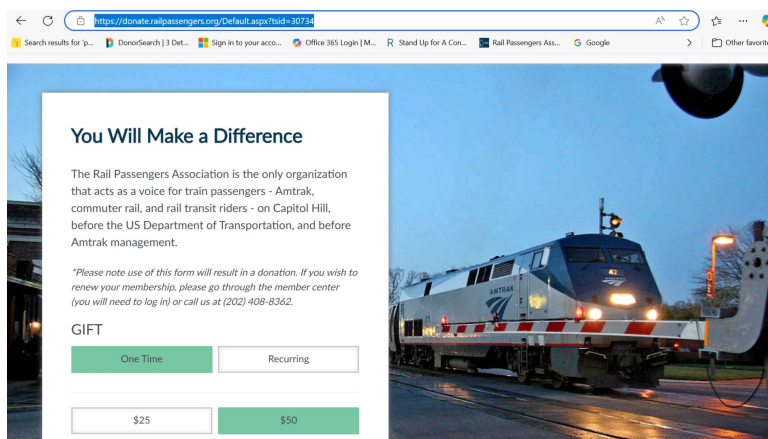
[CLICK HERE](#)

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
- Donor Advised Funds
- Employer Match
- RPA Signature Visa Card
- Gift of Membership
- and More!

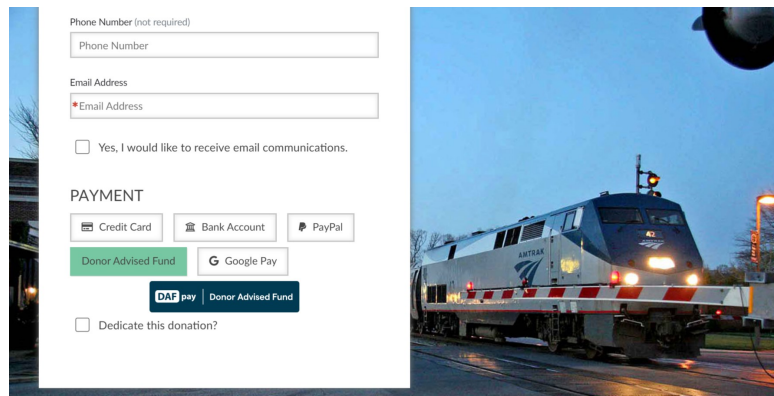
With multiple secure, protected methods of payment, you have more flexibility in the way dues are paid. Skip the hassle and [contact us](#) today for help setting up automatic or online payments.

- 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

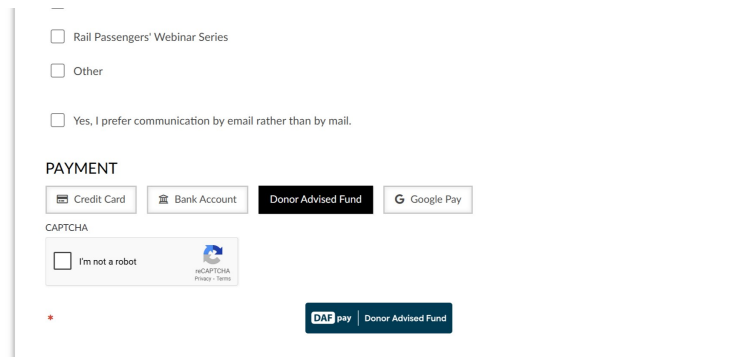
You can now donate or join/renew your membership, online, through your donor advised fund using DAFpay. All Rail Passengers forms now include a “Donor Advised Fund” button under Payment.

Donation Form:



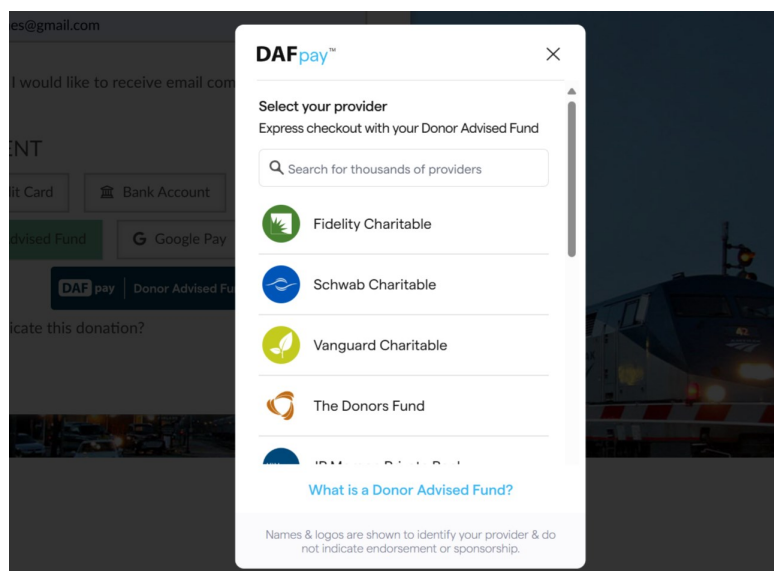
The screenshot shows a donation form on the left and a background image of a train on the right. The form includes fields for Phone Number (not required) and Email Address. Below these is a checkbox for "Yes, I would like to receive email communications." The "PAYMENT" section offers options for Credit Card, Bank Account, PayPal, Donor Advised Fund (highlighted in green), and Google Pay. A "DAF pay | Donor Advised Fund" button is visible. At the bottom, there is a checkbox for "Dedicate this donation?".

Membership Form:



The screenshot shows a membership form. It includes checkboxes for "Rail Passengers' Webinar Series", "Other", and "Yes, I prefer communication by email rather than by mail." The "PAYMENT" section offers options for Credit Card, Bank Account, Donor Advised Fund (highlighted in black), and Google Pay. Below this is a CAPTCHA section with a checkbox for "I'm not a robot" and a "DAF pay | Donor Advised Fund" button.

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.



The screenshot shows the DAFpay screen with a modal window titled "Select your provider". The modal includes a search bar and a list of providers: Fidelity Charitable, Schwab Charitable, Vanguard Charitable, The Donors Fund, and a partially visible "Fidelity Charitable". A link "What is a Donor Advised Fund?" is at the bottom. A disclaimer at the bottom states: "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 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:



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