



NOTICE: THE RAIL PASSENGERS OFFICE WILL BE CLOSED FROM MONDAY, DECEMBER 22ND TIL MONDAY, JANUARY 5TH FOR THE HOLIDAYS.

Association News

Rail Passengers Association Responds to Release of Union Pacific's Filing for \$85 Billion Merger with Norfolk Southern

The Rail Passengers Association today expressed deep concern over Union Pacific's application to the Surface Transportation Board (STB) [[Docket No. FD 36873](#)], seeking approval for an \$85 billion merger with Norfolk Southern. If approved, this deal would create a transcontinental mega-railroad spanning 43 states—an unprecedented consolidation that raises serious questions for the long-term future of the U.S. rail network for tens of millions of rail passengers. [[stb.gov](#)]

Millions of Americans rely on intercity and commuter trains that operate over Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern rightsofway. This merger introduces dramatic uncertainty for those passengers, as past consolidations have often led to service disruptions, reduced access, and diminished accountability for host railroads.

“Passenger trains depend on fair and reliable access to freightowned tracks,” said Jim Mathews, President & CEO of Rail Passengers Association. “A merger of this scale could jeopardize that access and undermine decades of progress toward a more connected national rail network. The STB must ensure that passenger rights and public mobility are not sacrificed in the name of shareholder gains.”

History offers sobering lessons. The 1996 Union Pacific–Southern Pacific merger triggered widespread freight congestion that rippled across the national rail network, delaying trains for months and forcing costly schedule adjustments. Similarly, the 1999 Burlington Northern–Santa Fe and Canadian National merger attempt raised alarms over diminished competition and service reliability—concerns that are only more relevant today, with even less competition within the industry. These precedents underscore the need for rigorous oversight to prevent harm to both passengers and freight customers.

[[Surface Transportation Board's UP-NS Merger Resources Page](#)]

Beyond passenger concerns, shippers, farmers, manufacturers, and railroad workers have voiced strong opposition to the deal, warning that it could erode competition in the freight rail market. With fewer major carriers controlling vast swaths of the nation's rail infrastructure, these stakeholders fear higher shipping costs, reduced service options, and increased vulnerability to supply chain disruptions.

[>>CLICK HERE FOR THE FULL PRESS RELEASE<<](#)

A Merger That Preserves the Status Quo, At Best

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

Earlier today, Union Pacific [filed its long-anticipated application with the Surface Transportation Board](#) seeking approval for an \$85 billion merger with Norfolk Southern. If approved, the transaction would create the first truly transcontinental freight railroad in U.S. history, stretching across 43 states and hosting a majority of the nation's intercity and state-supported passenger rail network.

The filing runs nearly 7,000 pages, and it will take weeks to fully digest. So, I won't promise this is a bullet-proof analysis. But I dug down this morning into the passenger-route specifics in Volume 2 of the UP-NS filing, and my initial review raised a lot of serious concerns for me, not because the application's details portend catastrophic harm, but because it sets such a low bar for success.

First off, let's stipulate this: preservation in this instance is not progress. I've been saying for months now in various settings that we don't have to settle for the status quo — heck, Congress explicitly rejected the passenger-rail status quo in 2021 when it wrote [the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#), which became the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Throughout its filing, Union Pacific repeatedly asserts that the merger will allow additional freight trains to operate while maintaining current passenger service levels. That phrase appears again and again, applied to dozens of Amtrak routes and commuter services nationwide. From a passenger perspective, this is a strikingly modest claim.

Maintaining today's service is not the same as enabling growth. Federal rail policy — reflected in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the Corridor ID Program, and years of congressional direction — aims to expand frequencies, improve reliability, and connect more communities. By contrast, the merger application largely frames success as avoiding degradation of existing service, not improving it.

That's a pretty important distinction and it matters a lot, especially for a transaction of this scale. You can [read our full press release issued this morning by clicking here](#), but one thing we're trying to foot-stomp for reporters and observers is this mega-merger's scale: the combined UPNS host 57 percent of Amtrak's state-supported and long-distance routes, carrying 63 percent of all Amtrak state-supported and long-distance ridership. And nearly half of the 69 routes selected by the Federal Railroad Administration to be part of the Corridor Identification Program travel or would travel over combined UPNS rights-of-way.

The carriers' capacity arguments also raise eyebrows or at least raised mine. In multiple corridors, Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern say they can add freight trains without harming passenger operations because there is "sufficient capacity" to absorb the increase. Hmmm, really? Only a few years ago, Union Pacific told regulators with a straight face that it would cost roughly \$1 billion to add enough capacity to convert the Sunset Limited from a three-times-per-week train into daily service.

It's hard to reconcile those two positions. If the network truly has ample latent capacity today, why was daily passenger service portrayed so recently as prohibitively expensive? As one member of our policy team put it bluntly: *the math ain't mathing*.

[>>HEAD TO OUR WEBSITE FOR MORE<<](#)

A Look Back & The Fight Ahead



Rail Passengers President + CEO Jim Mathews looks back at a successful year for passenger rail while keeping an eye on the advocacy fights to come.

Schoolhouse Rock and Next Year's Rail Bill

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

I'll admit it: I'm a Gen-X'er, a child of the 1970s. I've bribed people to hide pictures of me wearing skinny ties and even skinnier jeans. My friends and I waited up until midnight on a hot summer night in August of 1981 to watch this brand-new thing called "MTV" showing [quirky music videos of European rock bands](#) I'd never heard of. And I grew up glued to Saturday morning cartoons peppered with Schoolhouse Rock civics lessons – including one of the most famous ones, 1975's ["I'm Just A Bill,"](#) tracing the path of a bill through Congress to become a law.

As 2025 ends and a really consequential 2026 legislative calendar looms, all of us could do worse than to go back and re-watch [I'm Just A Bill](#). ([You can do just that by clicking here.](#)) The historic five-year Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, expires at the end of next September. Congress – well, some parts of it, anyway – is trying to write the law that replaces it.

Offices on both sides are asking us for help and we're doing our best to provide it, just as we did when the IIJA was coming together in 2021. But there will be a lot of twists and turns, and there will be a few key moments next Spring and Summer when we'll need all of YOU to raise your voices. Remember, that's our strength: 127,000 members, donors, and supporters all around the country telling members of Congress that passenger rail and transit are important to them. That is NOT nothing.

If you didn't click the link above to re-watch I'm Just A Bill ([c'mon, it's three minutes, you know you want to!](#)), it opens with our plucky little bill -- about rail crossings! -- sitting on the Capitol steps lamenting that he has had many ups and downs, twists and turns, trips to committee, trips out of committee, and is in consideration with "a lot of other bills." That's a pretty good summation of how 2026 is likely to play out in Congress: with midterms looming and re-election campaigns beginning in earnest by the Summer, the window for influencing the IIJA's replacement (a process called "reauthorization") will be small and a lot of others will be jostling for attention at the same time.

Next Spring and Summer, you'll probably get emails from us asking you to call your member of Congress, or to use our tools to help you write an email to that office, or some other call to action. **Five years ago, thousands of you stepped up to do that and I'm hoping you'll do it again. Because this time the stakes are even higher.**

[>>I'M JUST A BLOG. I'M ONLY A BLOG<<<](#)

Field Notes

Please email [Joe Aiello](#) if you have any local, state or regional stories/projects 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!

[Proposed Class I megamerger could shake things up for Amtrak in 2026, Progressive Railroading](#)

Rail Passengers President + CEO is quoted in this long form piece from

Progressive Railroad on what the proposed "merger" between Union Pacific Railroad & Norfolk Southern could mean for passenger rail - and what will be asked of the STB in its evaluation of the deal.

[DOT extends deadline to apply for intercity passenger rail grants, Smart Cities Dive](#)

\$5M is up for grabs for states outside the NEC who want to get passenger rail projects off the ground (looking at you Wisconsin and Arizona)

[STB renews charter of passenger advisory committee, Trains](#)

The STB's Passenger Rail Advisory Committee (of which our President & CEO is a member) will continue on

[America's Most Reliable Public Transportation Subway Belongs To A Thriving East Coast City, Islands](#)

I'm sure some of our friends in The Hub might snicker at this

[Why the U.S. struggles with passenger service despite having the most rail lines, NPR](#)

We have more rail tracks than anyone and the greatest freight system in the world - but why is passenger rail such a mystery?

[First research phase of Chattanooga passenger rail project nearly complete, mayor says, Chattanooga Times Free Press](#)

Chattanooga has put their USDOT Corridor ID grant, issued in 2023 to study an Atlanta-Chattanooga-Nashville-Memphis Corridor passenger rail line, to good use and is in the process of creating a nonprofit entity to oversee the project going forward.

[Amtrak Workers Get \\$900 Holiday Bonuses After Managers Give Theirs up, Business Insider](#)

Over 18k unionized Amtrak workers are getting a little extra in their stockings this year.

[Pritzker signs CTA/Metra/Pace overhaul that 'makes transit safer and more reliable', Chicago Sun-Times](#)

The Northern Illinois Transit Authority Act, which creates a new regional authority of the same name and funds a number of investments in public transit, capital projects, and tollways across the state, officially goes into effect in June 2026.

[10 megaprojects begin construction across US next year, Newsweek](#)

Two major passenger rail projects, which are set to begin construction at some point next year, are part of this list

[Toronto-Quebec City high-speed rail: Alto's fast-track route - Railway Supply](#)

In an effort to speed up the planning process for infrastructure projects, namely a proposed high-speed line between Toronto and Quebec City, a bill to "accelerate planning, design, and engineering" is currently under review in Parliament



**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

Save the Date(s)!





Registration and council business meeting information to follow.

Note: Attendees will be responsible for securing their own lodging needs.



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**, bounced between Association business and prep for today's announcement by Union Pacific that it has filed its application with the Surface Transportation Board to acquire Norfolk Southern. Jim pulled together Board meeting materials for the final Association Board meeting of the year, helped with interviews of several strong Volunteer Staff candidates, and worked with coalition partners tracking the UPNS merger.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, continued to focus on developing the association's response to the UP's proposed merger with NS – including briefing the Rail Passengers Association on activities and strategy around the issue – while also working to develop materials to help policymakers better understand passenger rail needs in the upcoming authorization.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, conducted interviews with fabulous candidates who submitted resumes in response to our call for volunteers, worked with our Accounting partners on November financials, continued work on the January 2026 fundraising appeal, met with our partners at CharityEngine to discuss enhancements being worked on for deployment in 2026 and processed membership dues sent to the DC office.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, staffed the final Board of Directors meeting for 2025 this week, worked with fellow staff on our UP/NS merger proposal press release, interviewed a potential volunteer candidate, continued to prepare for a "fact finding" trip to Toledo in February, and wrapped up some loose threads with members before our two-week break.
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, continues to support our members - both new and renewing - by assisting with access to their membership portals and processing membership-related requests. Please note that if you are renewing for the first time through the CharityEngine portal and previously had household members linked to your NEON account, those household members must be manually re-linked and assigned new member numbers. If your household has changed or you need specific individuals connected to your renewal, please email Kimberly at knotarianni@narprail.org so she can ensure your membership is set up correctly.

Apply for Volunteer Staff at Rail Passengers Association

**VOLUNTEERS
NEEDED**



[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE!](#)

End of Year Giving



The Rail Passengers Association would be honored if you choose to include us in your End of Year giving plans. If a check is your preferred method of distributing financial support, we encourage you to [download the attached mail-in donation form](#) and mail it to the DC Office.

Mail to:

Rail Passengers Association
1200 G Street, NW, Suite 520
Washington, DC 20005
ATTN: End of Year

Your partnership allows us to work for you, your fellow passengers and communities across the country. Thank you for your support!

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!

New items available!





Rail Passengers Timetables



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

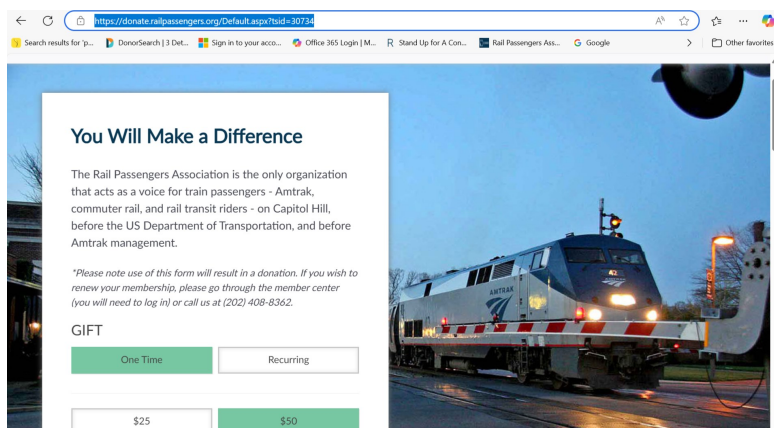
[CLICK HERE](http://railpassengers.org/timetables)

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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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:

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- Donor Advised Funds
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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

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Email Address

☐ Yes, I would like to receive email communications.

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Donor Advised Fund

☐ Dedicate this donation?

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☐ Rail Passengers' Webinar Series

☐ Other

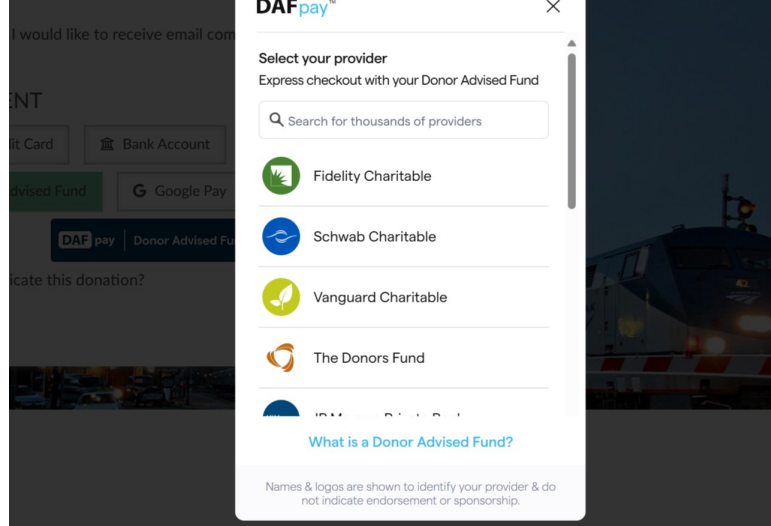
☐ Yes, I prefer communication by email rather than by mail.

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CAPTCHA

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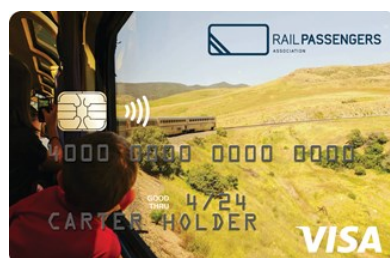


Select your provider, then follow their prompts. If you need to provide information on Rail Passengers Association, please use the below:

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

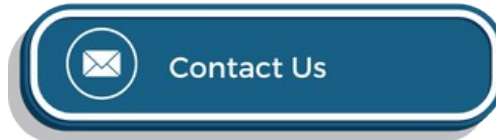


the exclusive provider of the [Rail Passengers Association-branded Visa credit card](#) with our logo, which supports our work by giving back to our organization, and gives you 1 point for every \$1 you spend to redeem for travel and merchandise. The card has no annual fee, no balance transfer fees, 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:



RAIL PASSENGERS
EST. 1967

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