



Photo credit: David Perault

RAIL PASSENGERS  
ASSOCIATION

FRIDAY HOTLINE

#1430

FEBRUARY 27<sup>TH</sup>, 2026



## Association News

### Less Risky, Less Costly: Amtrak's New LD Strategy

*by Jim Mathews / President & CEO*

The online commentariat erupted this week when [Amtrak revealed](#) that it's abandoning its previous Superliner bi-level replacement strategy and will instead soon re-issue a Request for Proposals to industry in order to speed new-car deliveries while broadening the field of potential carbuilders and reducing risk.

The news lit up all the online hangouts, from younger transportation and rail enthusiasts on Reddit to older train riders on Facebook and everywhere in-between. Some people were relieved and praised the decision. Others said it was the worst decision ever. Still others declared, with great certainty, that they already disliked elements of the car designs that will roll out.

The trouble, of course, is that there aren't yet any car designs for them to like or dislike.

The bi-level procurement launched in 2022 was officially suspended. The Federal Railroad Administration earlier this year also asked Amtrak to pause the single-level procurement that kicked off last August so that program managers could conduct a thorough alternatives review...a review that wound up looking at nine different alternatives.

Where everyone landed was that despite suggestions during the initial request-for-information phase that industry could handle the ideas that were being floated, the carbuilders who actually responded to the eventual RFP warned that the desired designs -- based on a bi-level semi-permanently coupled trainset -- would be expensive, complicated, risky, and tough to deliver in a timely way.

So, FRA and Amtrak looked to do a re-set. Assuming FRA and Amtrak's top leadership don't run into any last-minute issues, we can probably expect an RFP to come out pretty shortly; the objective is to be under contract by the end of 2027.

Only then will there be car designs to like or dislike.

[READ MORE](#)

### Passengers React to Restructuring Proposal

*With reporting by:*

*Sean Jeans-Gail, VP + Gov't Affairs and Policy*

*Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement + Organizing*

**Amtrak may face a sweeping overhaul of its operational structure at the behest of senior officials within the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) — and Rail Passengers Association is committed to ensuring there is public oversight of the process.**

[Bloomberg News first reported that labor groups, including the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen \(BLET\), are raising alarms](#) that an initiative being developed by the Federal Railroad Administration to restructure Amtrak could threaten worker protections—and even open the door to privatization. In a memo quoted by *Bloomberg*, BLET warned that

such a shift raises "legitimate and substantive concerns regarding the maintenance of qualifications, preservation of established work jurisdiction... and the continued protection and enforcement of existing Agreement rights."

In response to the *Bloomberg* story, Rail Passengers shared further details on a restructuring that could split the railroad into three entities — **operations**, **rollingstock management**, and **infrastructure management**.

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### The big picture

The FRA has not released a formal proposal, and the U.S. Department of Transportation insists the move is not about privatization. In the absence of a formal proposal, some labor groups and rail passengers are expressing concern over the future of the national rail network — especially longdistance and rural service. Still other passengers, however, have expressed interest in how a restructuring could actually improve U.S. rail operations so long as certain conditions, including explicit rejection of privatization, were met.

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### How the restructuring COULD work

The restructuring [has only been teased](#) by FRA officials, with no formal release of details, initial briefings to stakeholders have sketched a rough outline of what an initial proposal could look like:

- **NRPC (Amtrak)** becomes a holding company.
- **Infrastructure Management Entity** takes over all Amtrakowned infrastructure, including Northeast Corridor dispatching, maintenance, and capital projects.
- **Rolling Stock Management Entity** manages all equipment, maintenance shops, and could pool stateowned fleets.
- **Operational Entity** runs trains across the Northeast Corridor, statesupported routes, and longdistance services.

As we previously noted, the rollingstock pool [resembles a leasing model we are advocating for in the upcoming surface transportation bill](#). However, it would be important to implement safeguards to prevent the Operational Entity from becoming a "profit center" for the other two, which would undermine service quality and endanger long-term sustainability. It would also be important to make sure the Rolling Stock Entity can support Operations as a primary mission.

[READ MORE](#)

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## Field Notes

**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](#) 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@narprail.org](mailto:hotline@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!*

## [‘Mechanical issue’ leaves Amtrak train stalled in Kalamazoo for 4 hours, mlive](#)

More mechanical related issues for passengers onboard a Michigan services train.

## [On track? How the future of passenger rail in Colorado may end up on your ballot, KOAA](#)

Front Range Passenger Rail could hit the 2026 ballot with a question for a halfcent sales tax to support train service from Fort Collins to Pueblo - giving residents more options than sitting in traffic on I-25

## [Illinois bill could set goals for hourly high speed trains across Midwest, WAND TV](#)

The "Passenger Rail Planning Act," led by IL Rep. Rita Mayfield, seeks to establish hourly train service across the Land of Lincoln and improve interstate connections. It also directs IDOT to prioritize these goals in FRA Corridor ID submissions

## [How New Amtrak Maintenance Facilities Improve Reliability and Reduce Delays, Amtrak Media](#)

Amtrak has released a video showing the extensive work being done to their new maintenance facilities in Seattle, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, DC, and upstate New York to handle the brand new Airo fleet.

## [Commuter rail to Santa Barbara on track for April or May, VC Star](#)

After a series of starts, stops, and the outright cancellation of planning - expanded morning rush hour commuter service in SoCal between Ventura County to Santa Barbara County is set to roll this spring.

## [New Commuter Rail fare gates at South Station break down again, Boston.com](#)

The new fare gates at Boston's South Station are only two months old but are already seeing weather related issues causing them to shut down.

## [Planned Springfield Station Expansion Anticipates More Amtrak Service in Western Mass, Streetsblog Massachusetts](#)

The historic 187-year-old station (rebuilt six times) is going through a new transportation to get ready to expand upon the over a dozen trains it sees each day.

## [Sonoma-Marin rail system tax extension will appear on June ballot, Northern California Public Media](#)

Transit funding will be on the ballot this June in Sonoma and Marin counties in Northern California in the form of an extension of the current \$.25 sales tax that supports the Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit system. The current funding plan expires in 2029

## [State, federal officials hear from public on proposed Scranton-to-New York City passenger train, WVIA](#)

PennDOT recently held its first town hall webinar to answer public feedback and questions on the long discussed passenger service between Scranton and NYC. The ongoing service development plan process should be wrapped up by 2028.



**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.

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## Upcoming Events

### Advocacy Workshops + Council Business Meeting





**RAIL PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION**

## 2026 DC WORKSHOPS

+ Days on the Hill

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

The image shows a street view of the U.S. Capitol building in Washington, D.C., with a road leading towards it under a clear sky.

### [DC ADVOCACY WORKSHOPS REGISTRATION](#)

**Registration is \$125.00**

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

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

Stay tuned to [www.railpassengers.org/dc2026](http://www.railpassengers.org/dc2026) for more information.



**RAIL PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION**

## 2026 SPRING COUNCIL BUSINESS MEETING

**April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2026**  
Open Gov Hub  
1100 13th Street NW, Suite 800

The image shows a large, empty conference room with rows of desks and chairs, ready for a meeting.

### [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](http://www.railpassengers.org/2026SpringCouncilMeeting) for more information.

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## Local Meetings + Events

Please contact Joe Aiello ([jaiello@narprail.org](mailto:jaiello@narprail.org)) to have a local, state or regional meeting added to the Rail Passengers calendar (print and on-line) of upcoming events!

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## 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**, briefed Senate staffers, worked on liability legislation, explored partnerships with like-minded transportation nonprofits, and attended to follow-up items from his recent site visit to Toledo ahead of this Fall's RailNation: Toledo event.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, worked with stakeholder

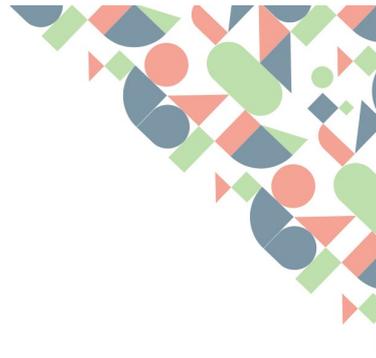
organizations on developing legislative language for the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization.

- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, processed membership dues and donation checks sent to the DC office, met with CharityEngine to continue discussion of upcoming enhancements, created fundraising solicitations and tended to the Association's administrative and operational needs.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, spent a lot of time this week returning calls and emails from last week while away in Toledo. Spoke to some stakeholders in state ARPs about some upcoming events and potential ballot initiatives.
- **John Christoph, Chief Data Scientist & Research/Analysis Lead**, has completed preliminary validation of our new ridership model as elaborated above, and the findings are robust enough that we've submitted an abstract for presentation at the 2026 Transportation Research Forum. This meeting will be held in Norfolk, VA the week before *Rail Passengers'* DC summit, giving our members the opportunity to discuss our most recent findings in their meetings with legislators (and yes, we *will* have updated FY2025 ridership reports on our website for the Summit as well, stay tuned for updates).
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, continues to process membership renewals, new memberships, troubleshoot access to the User Center, password resets, and adding additional sub-memberships for those who qualify for that benefit. If, after renewing an existing CharityEngine membership because your account was not set up for auto-renew, you notice that you have been assigned a "new" CharityEngine ID number (*this does not apply to individuals who have not yet renewed from the NEON software*), please contact Kimberly so she can consolidate your accounts. Your original CharityEngine ID number remains the valid number for your membership.

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## Apply for Volunteer Staff at Rail Passengers Association

**VOLUNTEERS  
NEEDED**



[railpassengers.org/volunteer](http://railpassengers.org/volunteer)

Rail Passengers Association

[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE!](#)

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## Membership How-To

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

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

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

[Click here](#) for instructions.

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## We Have Merch!

New items available!





 Tell Us Your Story

 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



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

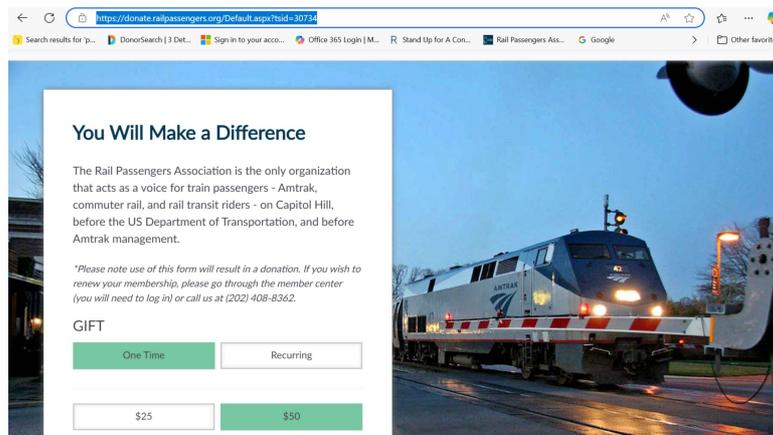
[CLICK HERE](http://railpassengers.org/timetables)

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>



**You Will Make a Difference**

The Rail Passengers Association is the only organization that acts as a voice for train passengers - Amtrak, commuter rail, and rail transit riders - on Capitol Hill, before the US Department of Transportation, and before Amtrak management.

*\*Please note use of this form will result in a donation. If you wish to renew your membership, please go through the member center (you will need to log in) or call us at (202) 408-8362.*

**GIFT**



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!

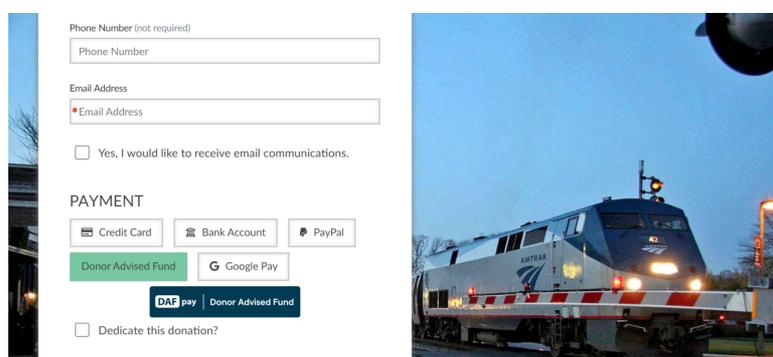
With multiple secure, protected methods of payment, you have more flexibility in the way dues are paid. Skip the hassle and [contact us](#) today for help setting up automatic or online payments.

- 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:



Phone Number (not required)

Phone Number

Email Address

Email Address

Yes, I would like to receive email communications.

**PAYMENT**

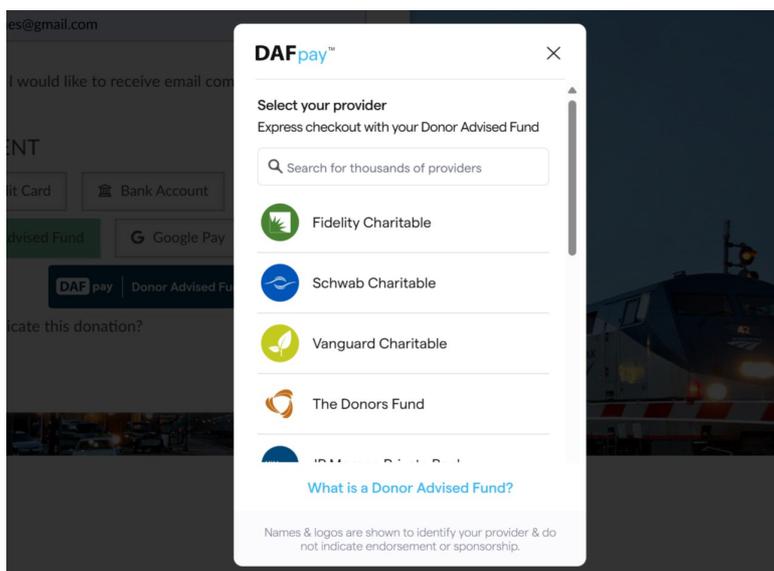
Dedicate this donation?

### Membership Form:

The screenshot shows a membership form with the following elements:

- Three checkboxes: "Rail Passengers' Webinar Series", "Other", and "Yes, I prefer communication by email rather than by mail."
- A "PAYMENT" section with four buttons: "Credit Card", "Bank Account", "Donor Advised Fund" (highlighted in black), and "Google Pay".
- A "CAPTCHA" section with a checkbox "I'm not a robot" and a reCAPTCHA logo.
- A "DAF pay | Donor Advised Fund" button at the bottom.

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](mailto:jstone@narprail.org)  
Tax ID: 36-2615221

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## 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](http://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.



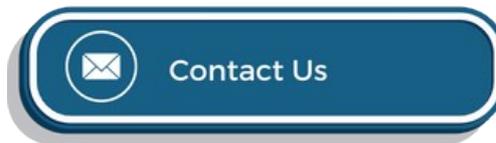
Rail Passengers Association Earns Coveted 4-Star Rating from Charity Navigator

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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