



Photo credit: Randy Turner



FRIDAY HOTLINE

#1421

DECEMBER 12TH, 2025



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

## Association News

### 2025 Rail Wrapped

They said nobody rides trains anymore. That it is an "outdated technology."

The data say otherwise.

2025 wasn't just a good year for passenger rail - it was a record-breaking one. From the massive success of the Borealis in the Midwest, the historic return of service to the Gulf Coast, and everything in-between.

The year wasn't without its setbacks. Cancellations, delays, bad orders, shortages, and budget fights - but we still rode.

You spent the year skipping traffic, lowering emissions, and connecting communities. But here's the thing about "Wrapped" - it only happens if you keep listening (or, in this case, riding and funding).

As we head into 2026, let's make sure Congress knows this isn't a fluke. It's a movement.

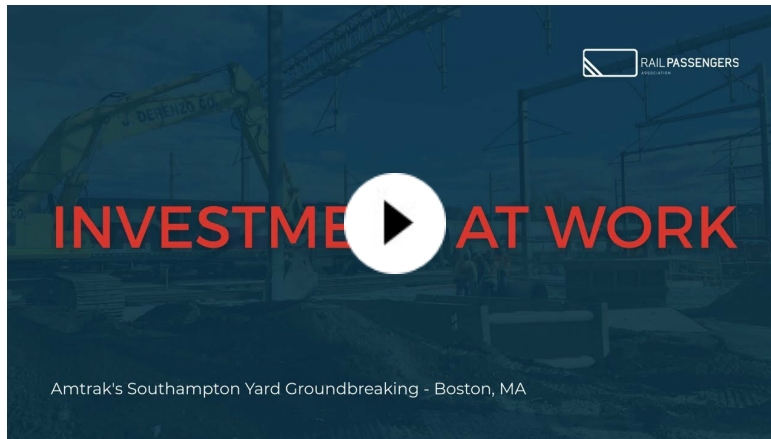


### Investment at Work

Rail Passengers President + CEO Jim Mathews was invited to speak at Amtrak's Southampton Yard groundbreaking ceremony in November as they prepared to welcome the new Airo trainsets in 2026 with a \$583M

investment.

In this video, Jim talks about that project along with a payoff that was decades in the making.



## Judge Hands California High-Speed Rail a Win in Fight With Trump Administration Over Funding for High-Speed Rail

by [Sean Jeans-Gail | VP of Gov't Affairs](#)

A recent federal court decision rejecting the Trump administration's attempt to dismiss California's lawsuit over canceled high-speed rail funding marks a win for the California High-Speed Rail Authority. While the ruling does not immediately restore the \$4 billion in federal grants, it ensures California's challenge can proceed, recapturing some momentum for the country's most ambitious rail project.

In an order filed in the US District Court for the Eastern District of California Judge Dale Drozd denied the Trump Administration's request to dismiss the state of California's lawsuit, providing California a path forward to contest the U.S. Department of Transportation's decision to claw back funds. ([You can read the full text of the judge's order by clicking here.](#))

California has already invested heavily in the project, completing 70 miles of guideway and constructing over 50 major structures. The state is actively seeking proposals for a \$3.5 billion contract to install track and systems, signaling continued support at the state level despite federal headwinds. A favorable outcome in this lawsuit could unlock stalled federal funds, accelerating construction and creating thousands of jobs in engineering, manufacturing, and operations.

Beyond California, the case has national implications, highlighting the tension between state-led innovation and shifting federal priorities. If California prevails, it sets a precedent that strengthens legal protections for infrastructure funding agreements, giving states confidence to pursue transformative projects. This stability is essential for attracting private investment and maintaining momentum in sectors like rail, where uncertainty can stall progress.

While the decision does not immediately restore the \$4 billion in funding, it keeps the possibility of restoring the funds alive. In a similar case, CAHSRA was able to restore \$929 million the first Trump Administration attempted to rescind in 2019.

The USDOT has included some of the funds it's attempting to claw back from California in a notice of funding of opportunity for the Federal – State Partnership for Intercity Rail Program, and we expect this ruling to affect that round of grantmaking for other rail projects,

Drozd ordered the federal government to "lodge" (file) the administrative record within thirty days. Lodging the administrative record means submitting to a court the complete set of documents that were considered by an agency during its decision-making process, ensuring that the court has all relevant information available for its review. This process helps the court determine if the agency's decision was rational and followed the law.

## Popularity of Transit Merchandise and Experiences for Holidays

By [Philip Mayer, Association Volunteer](#)

One indication of America's increasing fondness of trains and public transit is the popularity in its merchandise, especially during the December holidays.

### Washington, DC

WMATA, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, opened its third annual holiday Pop-up Shop on November 29. The sale will be held in the

The enormously popular Metro holiday sweater is back in adult and youth sizes. There were toys such as a wooden bus and train, and a stuffed Metro bear. Holiday ornaments are sold in packs of \$50 for 8 or one elaborate train ornament for the same price.

Everything looked so appealing, but I could not resist buying a varsity style brown and cream-colored jacket, which after only a few days has already garnered several positive comments from people I pass on the street or in the grocery store. And just for fun, I also bought a Metro themed dreidel which at \$1 seemed incredibly inexpensive, especially since library cardholders received a 10% discount.

### **Philadelphia**

In Philadelphia, SEPTA, Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, opened their holiday popup market on November 26 on Market St. adjacent to SEPTA's headquarters. Their offerings include a wide array of stylish transit related clothing. Featured on some t-shirts, sweatshirts, and totebags is local artist Margaret Mahoney's winning submission for the 2025 holiday design, which features a SEPTA bus driving in front of the Philadelphia skyline. SEPTA also offers meticulously crafted scale models of Comet commuter train cars. First manufactured in the early 1970s, SEPTA first acquired Comet cars in 1987. The elegant models feature period appropriate livery and sell for \$399.95.

### **San Francisco**

San Francisco's MUNI always has an impressive array of merchandise on offer including socks, mugs, t-shirts, and hats. This year, their "Merry Days of MUNI" collection includes very vibrant and colorful pajamas and pullovers featuring images from across the city. There is also a wooden muni train car and wrapping paper on sale.

### **Chicago**

In the Chicago area, Metra's 2025 holiday trains were an enormous success. All three train experiences, scheduled for December 6, 13, and 20 sold out very quickly. Their popularity was surely aided by their modest price of \$10. On the Metra Electric Line on December 13, a ride will include a visit to a North Pole winter wonderland at Millennium Station, featuring treats, holiday music, face painting and other fun activities. On the other lines, the ride includes a round-trip ride on a decorated train featuring holiday characters and treats. "Our Holiday Trains have become an annual tradition for our riders and their families, and we are happy to be operating them again," said Metra CEO/Executive Director Jim Derwinski. "It's our way to spread a little holiday joy and thank our riders for making Metra part of their lives all year."

### **Boston**

The MBTA's, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, first annual "ugly sweater" might not be "ugly" per se, but certainly is a loud conversation starter for this holiday season. The light blue sweater features a green line light rail vehicle (LRV) with Boston's iconic skyline in the background. Multi-colored LED lights illuminate the train as well as the buildings in the background.

### **New York**

In New York City on December 2, MTA, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, unveiled a line of merchandise in collaboration with the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in celebration of the 40th anniversary of MTA Arts and Design, an arm of MTA dedicated to bringing the arts to the system. The exhibit and merchandise is inspired by the system's 81st St.-Museum of Natural History station on the B and C lines.

The station's expansive mixed-media art installation, titled "For Want of a Nail," comprises glass mosaic, glass tile, ceramic tile, granite, and bronze relief. "Transit's not just a way to get from point A to point B, it's a cultural experience," said MTA Chair and CEO Janno Lieber. "Few stations make the point better than 81 St-Museum of Natural History, with its stunning mosaics."

The collection of apparel and accessories for all ages — adult and children's t-shirts, a fleece sweatshirt, water bottle, tote, backpack, hat, stickers, magnets and collectible pins. Merchandise is available exclusively at the AMNH Gift Shop and online store while supplies last.

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## **Field Notes**

Please email [Joe Aiello](mailto:Joe.Aiello@mta.com) 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@narprrail.org](mailto:jaiello@narprrail.org) with the subject "HOTLINE PHOTO"

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## 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!*

### [The Magic That Moves Us: Why Trains Are the Soul of the Season, All Aboard Ohio](#)

For so many of us, the train set lapping the holiday town set up under the Christmas tree is a core memory from our childhood. All Aboard Ohio Communications Director Beth Russell dives into that familiar holiday feeling and looks at the "season built on rail."

### [Better than Amtrak? New 'MARK' commission aims to provide Milwaukee-to-Chicago rail alternative, CBS 58](#)

Decades in the making, the Milwaukee Area-Racine-Kenosha Passenger Rail Commission was officially born last week with hopes to have a formal partnership with Metra (which currently stops in Kenosha).

### [Full trains, fewer passengers on Borealis routes - WIZM](#)

The Borealis was at 97% capacity at one point this summer - but the loss of the Horizon cars has hurt the overall number.

### ['Party time on that train': Officials seek more Amtrak Mardi Gras train data as ridership surges, AL.com](#)

Amtrak's pre-launch ridership estimate was for around 71k in the first year in operation. The Mardi Gras is on pace to more than double that.

### [Operation North Pole Christmas train returns to the rails, Metra](#)

For the first time since 2019, the Operation North Pole (ONP) Christmas train is returning to the Chicago suburbs

### [SEPTA, transport workers union reach new contract to avoid strike, PhillyVoice](#)

Things happen fast in the City of Brotherly Love. While the union still needs to vote to ratify the contract, a deal on a new two-year contract has been reached between SEPTA and Local 234.

### [SEPTA receives MARC cars to ease Regional Rail disruptions, but a supply shortage is delaying Silverliner repairs, PhillyVoice](#)

Officials in Maryland are helping out their northeast neighbors and sending over ten MARC cars to help ease problems caused by the ongoing work on the Silverliner fleet.

### [NC By Train sees highest ridership in 35 years of service, Spectrum News 1](#)

In 35 years of rail service, North Carolina's rail division has never had a month like they did this past October - with nearly 75,000 passengers on board.

### [Amtrak gives inside look at East River tunnel project to repair damage from Superstorm Sandy, ABC7 New York](#)

Six stories under NYC, project managers for the East Tunnel rehab gave members of the media a tour to mark the first six months of work.

### [Public feedback opportunities continue for west Phoenix transit expansion, Valley Metro](#)

For our friends in the Big Saguaro - Valley Metro is looking for public input on the planned I-10 West extension and have a number of meetings coming up before the final report lands on the desks of the City Council.

### [Texas-Oklahoma train route could be key in World Cup travel, Axios Dallas](#)

Passenger rail and public transit options are going to be VERY important come next summer.



[Keolis: Over 29M trips taken on MBTA commuter rail in 2025](#),  
Progressive Railroading

After the announcement last month that the MBTA saw its highest single month ridership in October since 2019, the agency has "unwrapped" commuter rail data for 2025.



**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

### Membership Mondays

**MEMBERSHIP MONDAYS** December 8th & 15th  
10am-2pm EST

**Need Help With:**

- Joining?
- Renewing?
- Accessing the User Center?
- Upgrading?

Join Kimberly Notarianni & Jonsie Stone for virtual office hours

Sign up at [railpassengers.org/membermonday](https://railpassengers.org/membermonday)

Have General Questions About Memberships (But **NOT** Trains)?

### Save the Date(s)!

**2026 DC WORKSHOPS + Days on the Hill**

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

**Registration and council business meeting information to follow.**

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

**2026 DC WORKSHOPS + DAYS ON THE HILL**

- Mid-Atlantic + Midwest: April 21 & 23
- Northeast + South: April 20 & 21
- Southwest, Northwest, Mountain & Plains: April 23 & 24
- Council Business Meeting: April 22

**Each Group:**  
Day 1 - In Office Workshop  
Day 2 - On the Hill Meetings

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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**, continued conversations aimed at expanding a coalition of stakeholders working to respond to the proposed Union Pacific-Norfolk Southern merger, took part in the Commuter Rail Coalition's DC workshop on liability alongside operators, congressional staff, and insurance brokers and underwriters (see below), did an interview with Nebraska public radio, and conducted several interviews with candidates for jobs on the Association's volunteer staff.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, attended the Commuter Rail Coalition's liability summit, where attendees explored market and policy solutions to the spiking costs for insurance premiums facing the industry.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, processed membership dues and donations sent to the DC office, created end of year digital fundraising messages, prepared January 2026 fundraising appeals, interviewed fabulous candidates who submitted resumes in response to our call volunteers and tended to the administrative/operational needs of the Association.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, spoke to a number of our supporters on [what happened on Amtrak 352 on Thanksgiving](#), created our "[2025 Rail Wrapped](#)" video, edited content for our digital end-of-year campaign, started planning for a potential visit to Toledo early in the new year, and is looking forward to the upcoming holiday 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](mailto:knotarianni@narprail.org) so she can ensure your membership is set up correctly.

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## Apply for Volunteer Staff at Rail Passengers Association

**VOLUNTEERS  
NEEDED**



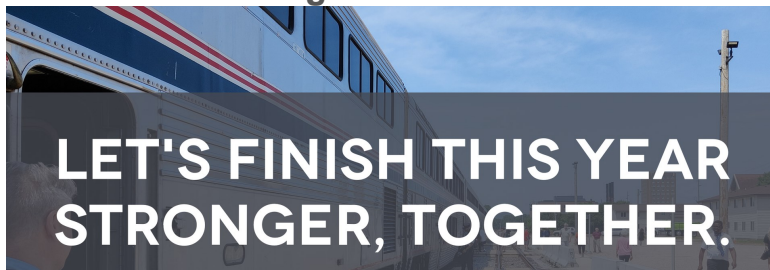
[railpassengers.org/volunteer](http://railpassengers.org/volunteer)

Rail Passengers Association

[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE!](#)

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## 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**

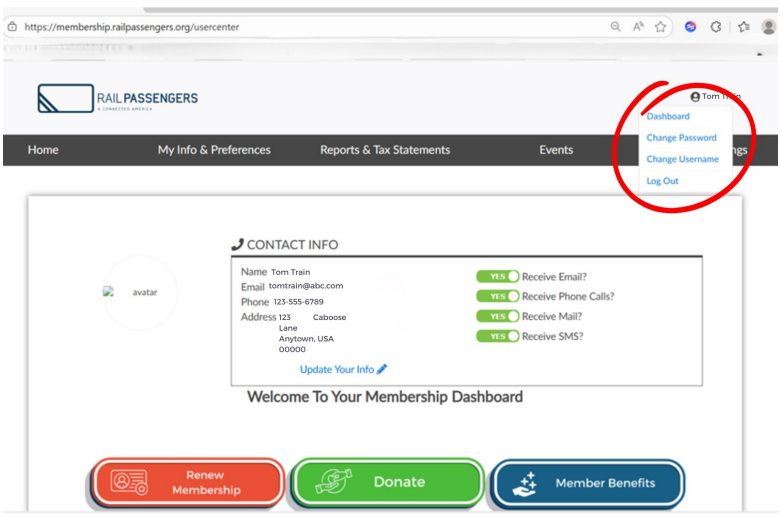
Your partnership allows us to work for you, your fellow passengers and communities across the country. Thank you for your support!

## CharityEngine User Center Update

We are excited to announce functionality enhancements now available in the User Center.

You can now change your Username when inside the self-service portal.

After logging into your account, your name appears in the upper right corner, Tom Train in the screenshot. Click on your name and navigation options including "Change Username" appears. Remember to save any changes you make



Also, your membership Type and Number displays under Accounts as shown in the below screenshot

ACCOUNTS SHOW Active

| Type                    | Amount  | Next Payment | This Year | Actions |
|-------------------------|---------|--------------|-----------|---------|
| Individual<br>(1234567) | \$61.49 | 3/3/26       | -         |         |

## 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



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:

Rail Passengers' Webinar Series

Other

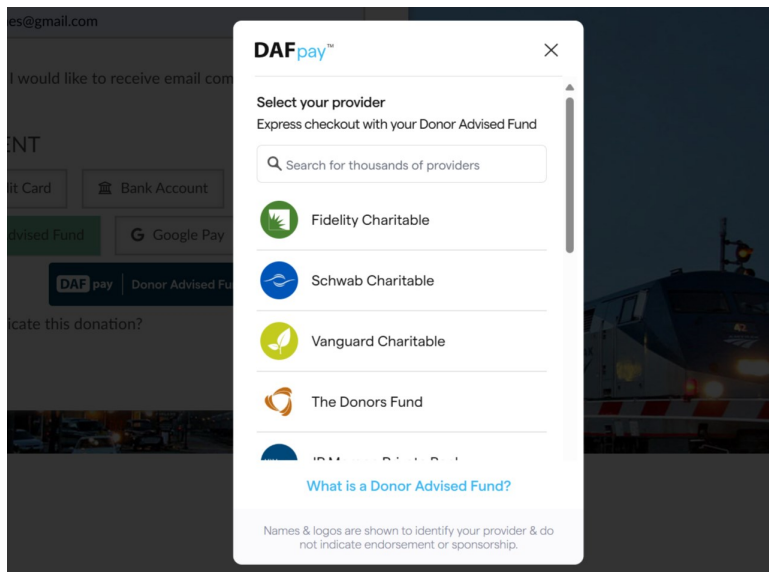
Yes, I prefer communication by email rather than by mail.

**PAYMENT**

**CAPTCHA**

I'm not a robot

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

## 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.

## Charity Navigator

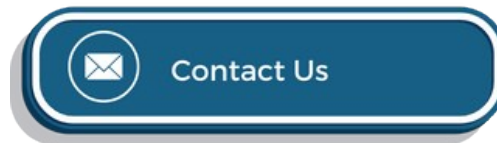


✦ **FOUR-STAR** ✦

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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