

RAILPASSENGERS



WEEKLY HOTLINE

Issue #1,394–May 9, 2025



Take Action

Association News



Celebrating the 156th Anniversary of the completion of the transcontinental railroad! [#NationalTrainDay](#)

Your Rail Passengers Association staff would love to hear how you spent Train Day. Email stories to [Joe Aiello](#) and don't forget to tag [@railpassengers](#) on social media.

Seriously, Amtrak? What Were You Thinking?

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

Well, I guess everyone saw it coming – but learning this week about Amtrak's massive reductions-in-force, or RIFs, was still a shock. And in my view, it's another example of Amtrak scoring an "own goal," cutting the people it needs to manage a growing portfolio of big projects and foolishly focusing on a "profitability" target that is neither possible nor legally required.

I was offsite Tuesday representing Rail Passengers at an all-day meeting of the Surface Transportation Board's Passenger Rail Advisory Committee when the texts started buzzing on my phone. Texts from good people,

experienced people, smart people, brought in to share their deep knowledge and expertise to start making Amtrak better again. Instead, they were sharing their goodbyes and their personal emails and asking to “stay in touch,” as one often does when you leave your job carrying your mementos in a cardboard box instead of a gift and a plaque.

In 2021, President Biden signed a law [giving Amtrak more money to invest in infrastructure than it had ever had in its bare-bones history](#) – \$22 billion set aside just for Amtrak alone out of \$66 billion designated for passenger-rail projects nationwide. And for a rail network limping by and underinvested in safe infrastructure for seven decades, it was long overdue.

But, [as Amtrak’s Inspector General observed](#) a few months after the Investment in Infrastructure and Jobs Act, or IIJA, was signed, “the sheer size of the IIJA’s funding and requirements could strain the company’s ability to manage its current operations while concurrently planning and managing a long-term multibillion-dollar infrastructure portfolio.”

OIG went on to urge Amtrak to pay close attention to “building and deploying a skilled workforce,” noting that the railroad needed to hire at least 750 new managers in Fiscal 2022 with “highly specialized skills,” and that Amtrak’s creation of its new Capital Delivery department – responding to earlier Amtrak OIG findings of weaknesses in capital delivery – needed to “move expeditiously.”

And so it did, as [Amtrak executives heeded the Inspector General’s advice](#) and tried to learn from previous procurement and major capital foibles.

A scant three years after the Inspector General flagged the need for a new, smart, experienced workforce at Amtrak to keep all these new projects moving, [Amtrak now decides instead to chop roughly 20 percent of its top-level managers and executives...before it was even required to do so.](#)

[\[Please continue reading here\]](#)

Coalition of Rail Workers, States and Passenger Rail Organizations Ask Congress to Support Amtrak and Rail Programs in Fiscal Year 2026 Budget

A coalition representing rail workers, State rail agencies, train passengers, and other advocacy organizations [issued a letter](#) urging Congress to fully fund Amtrak, the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail (FSP) Program, and the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program at authorized levels in the upcoming transportation budget.

[\[The full letter is available here\]](#)

“The federal investments made to Amtrak, FSP, and CRISI are essential to the operations and development of a safe and efficient U.S. transportation system,” stated the coalition in the letter. “Our nation’s intercity and regional passenger rail network moves tens of millions of Americans every year, offering an alternative to congested highways and crowded airports. These services also offer a safer way for families to travel, with passenger rail 17 times safer than riding in a car on a per passenger-mile basis.”

The coalition pointed to Amtrak’s record levels of ridership, and to State-supported services carrying record-setting numbers of passengers—including on the Amtrak *Downeaster* in Maine, all four Amtrak Virginia corridors, and the Amtrak *Cascades* service in Washington State.

“Amtrak’s annual appropriations are essential for operations in both rural and metropolitan communities and cannot be made up by advance appropriations provided by the IIJA,” the letter concluded. “Providing sufficient FY26 funding is necessary to ensure Amtrak workers carry out the day-to-day functions needed to meet these record levels of ridership, perform annual maintenance, and carry out core functions while making high-priority investments for future expansion.”

The letter was signed by the following organizations:

American Train Dispatchers Association

**Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen-International
Brotherhood of Teamsters**

**Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division-
International Brotherhood of Teamsters**

Brotherhood of Railroad Signalmen

Environmental Law & Policy Center

High Speed Rail Alliance

International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers and Transportation

International Brotherhood of Boilermakers

National Conference of Firemen & Oilers, 32BJ / SEIU

Rail Passengers Association

SMART, the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers- Transportation Division

States for Passenger Rail Coalition

Teamsters Rail Conference

Transport Workers Union of America

Transportation Communications Union

Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO

Amtrak Employees Criminally Charged In Medical Fraud

[By Rail Passengers Staff](#)

Amtrak's Inspector General's office uncovered widespread medical-claims fraud involving more than 100 Amtrak employees in seven states, who together managed to bilk Amtrak's health-care plan of more than \$12 million over a four-year period beginning in 2019.

"The sheer volume of employees who cavalierly participated in this scheme to steal Amtrak's funds suggests not only a serious lapse in basic ethics, but a troubling workforce culture, at least in the Northeast region, in which blatant criminal behavior was somehow normalized," [said Amtrak Inspector General Kevin H. Winters](#). "After assessing the significant number of employees involved, this case represents the largest employee conspiracy our office has ever investigated."

The Office of Inspector General, or OIG, says the scheme worked like this: some 119 employees accepted cash kickbacks from three health-care providers – an acupuncturist from Long Island City, New York, a New Jersey physician, and a New York podiatrist – who then used the employees' insurance information to file fraudulent claims for services never provided or which were simply unnecessary. In some cases, they even used information for the employees' dependents.

Of the 119 employees implicated, 61 were turned over to Amtrak management for potential "administrative disciplinary action," the Inspector General said, while a dozen employees have been criminally charged. Seven have pled guilty and await sentencing. Another 28 retired or resigned "as a direct result" of the probe, OIG says, while 30 left Amtrak for other reasons.

Although the scale of the scheme was extraordinary, in some ways [it mirrors a similar fraud scheme at the Long Island Rail Road, uncovered a decade ago by then U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of NY Preet Bharara](#). The essence of that fraud was that these employees exploited the overlap between the Long Island Rail Road's pension plan and the nationwide Railroad Retirement Board disability program, falsely claiming they were disabled in a way to coincide with their retirement date.

"These false statements, made under oath in disability applications, allowed LIRR employees to retire as early as age 50 with an LIRR pension, supplemented by the fraudulently obtained RRB disability annuity," the Justice Dept. said. That investigation led to 29 employees pleading guilty as part of a fraud that spanned 16 years until 2011.

Field Notes

Urgent Call to Action for Texas Rail Passengers!

[Heartland Flyer passenger train through Fort Worth at risk if Texas doesn't allocate funding](#), Fort Worth Report

The future of the Heartland Flyer, a crucial passenger train connecting Fort Worth and Oklahoma City, is at risk! Recent budget cuts have left Texas's funding share of approximately \$2.6 million annually in jeopardy. With

ridership soaring by over 14% in 2024, totaling 123,584 passengers, this service is more vital than ever.

Local officials are rallying for the restoration of funding, emphasizing that the Heartland Flyer not only supports college students and tourists but also injects an estimated \$18 million into our local economy each year.

As negotiations over the state budget continue, we need your voice!

What can you do?

[Use this link](#) to find our local representatives and contact their office to express your support for the Heartland Flyer.

Please email [Joe Aiello](#) if you have any local, state or regional stories/projects that you would like to see get 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!

[National Train Day events going strong without Amtrak's participation, Trains](#)

Trains Magazine's Bob Johnson has this great look at National Train Day (this year on May 10th) celebrations post-Amtrak's direct involvement, and shares a round-up of events taking place this year.

[Representatives Cohen, Titus and Scholten Introduce Bill to Reauthorize the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Program, Representative Steve Cohen](#)

The Rail Passengers Association has endorsed Representative Cohen's bill to reauthorize the Fed-State Partnership and the Corridor ID program with \$7.5B in funding through FY31.

[Alabama officials unconcerned over Amtrak funding arrangement as project moves toward July start, AL.com](#)

There was concern coming from those in some online communities about there not being any funding in the upcoming Alabama state budget for the Mardi Gras service - because of the nature of the 3-year deal with the city of Mobile, there wasn't supposed to be.

[Seattle's \\$300M Amtrak expansion to bring modern trains, transportation by 2027, KIRO 7](#)

The Pacific Northwest continues to bet on itself when it comes to public transportation - this time in the form of a \$300M maintenance facility that will be home to the brand new Airo trains, debuting next year, as well as Sounder commuter and Amtrak's long distance trains.

[Bill that would redirect DART funding advances to Texas House floor, NBC Dallas-Fort Worth](#)

House Bill 3187, recently voted out of the Transportation Committee, poses a significant threat to Dallas Area Rapid Transit. The bill mandates a redistribution of DART's voter-approved sales tax funding, stripping essential operational and capital funds from the agency - leading to immediate and irreversible cuts, including the elimination of thousands of jobs, loss of transit access for over 100,000 riders, and a 30% reduction in service levels.

[Restore Full SEPTA Funding, Bucks Co. Democratic Lawmakers Say, Levittown, PA Patch](#)

Without new state funding, SEPTA has warned it may need to eliminate five Regional Rail lines, discontinue 50 bus routes, and impose fare increases averaging 21.5%.

We ask our friends in eastern PA to contact their reps and push to save SETPA service.

[IL High-Speed Rail Public Interest Survey, Illinois High-Speed Railway Commission](#)

As part of a new feasibility study, the Illinois High-Speed Railway Commission is looking for public comment on a 220 mph high-speed corridor between Chicago & St. Louis. The route would be the backbone for a passenger rail network throughout Illinois.

The comment period ends May 11th.

[Video] [Montana's Passenger Rail Proposal: A Journey Continues Despite Legislative Setback](#), Montana Right Now

While the failure to pass a funding bill could be seen as a step back for proponents of Big Sky Passenger Rail, even the bill's sponsor knows that the future is still bright and conversation has just begun.

[Oklahoma lawmakers push for Heartland Flyer train route to continue with new bipartisan resolution](#), News 9

While lawmakers in their neighboring state try to cut funding, those in Oklahoma are throwing their weight into full support of the service.

[Colorado, Union Pacific sign agreement leading to mountain regular passenger rail service](#), Colorado Public Radio

This partnership aims to reduce congestion, save time and money, and lower pollution, while continuing to support freight operations essential to Colorado's economy



[WE ARE NOW ON BLUE SKY!](#)

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

Virginians For High Speed Rail 2025 VIRTUAL
TRANSPORTATION TOWN HALL SERIES

“What’s Happening in DC”

May 16, 2025 at 3:00pm



Art Guzzetti
 Vice President of Mobility Initiatives and Public Policy at APTA
 @APTA_info @ArtGuzzetti



Jim Matthews
 President/CEO of RPA
 @RailPassengers

Register (free): www.VHSR.com/townhall

Thank you to our generous sponsors for making this series possible!



The Face® Companies



Our President & CEO will be joining the [Virginians for High Speed Rail](#) Town Hall on May 16th to give the "inside the beltway" view of the current state of passenger rail in the US.

To register: www.vhsr.com/townhall

JOIN ME
 at **GBTA Sustainability Summit**
 on June 10 in Washington, D.C.!





At this year's [GBTA | Global Business Travel Association](#) Sustainability Summit, we're taking a broader approach—moving beyond carbon-focused discussions to include crucial social and environmental considerations.

Join us on June 10 in Washington, D.C. to collaborate, learn, and take action toward a more sustainable and responsible travel industry. Let's make the industry resilient together.

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**, prepped for and represented Rail Passengers at the Surface Transportation Board's Passenger Rail Advisory Committee meeting in Washington, D.C., where we found real and broad support from states, consultants, engineers, and even Class I railroad reps for expanding and improving passenger rail in the U.S.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, worked with coalition partners to support Amtrak and passenger rail grant programs in the upcoming budget, spoke with reporters about public private partnerships in US rail operations, and helped President and CEO Jim Mathews respond to the mass firings at Amtrak.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, continued working with our accounting partners to prepare for the FY2024 audit and close March financials. She also spent time crafting fundraising messages, processing membership dues and donations sent to the DC Office, and tending to the administrative needs of the Association.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, has been busy this week communicating with members & supporters on the news of the mass Amtrak firings, worked on logistics for the fall meeting, created graphics for a few comms projects, wrapped up research for a ridership study, and started the process of interviewing potential summer interns
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, continues to follow up on a number of membership-related inquiries and issues, assisting members with access to their constituent portal and helping resolve login and account concerns. Also coordinated with other staff members to streamline solutions to ongoing membership challenges and ensure a consistent approach with our CharityEngine team.
- **Lili Leonard, Development Assistant**, is pleased to announce our corporate sponsor page is live! Please visit <https://railpassengers.org/corporate> to learn more about opportunities, or send me an email - LLeonard@narprail.org.

Starting **Wednesday, February 19th**, all membership, donation, and event registration transactions are being processed through **CharityEngine**. **Neon** is no longer the Association's CRM of record.

?? If you have the **Neon User Center** bookmarked, please update it to: <https://membership.railpassengers.org/usercenter>.

?? Your **Neon username and Account ID** have already been transferred to CharityEngine. However, because your **password was unique to Neon**, you will need to reset it when logging in for the first time.

Below is a screenshot of the **CharityEngine Constituent Portal** for reference.

Log in

Username

Password

Remember me [Forgot password?](#)

LOG IN

Over the coming weeks and months, we will continue to enhance the system. If you have any questions or need assistance, please [email Kimberly A. Notarianni](#)

As with any upgrade, there may be minor hiccups. Your Association staff is here to help and if necessary, work with CharityEngine to gain the answers. We are excited by the full complement of options and benefits that will be available to our supporters through one system.

Thank you for your patience and cooperation.

?? New Dashboard Update in Your Constituent Portal!

When you access your constituent portal this week, you'll notice an exciting update to your **dashboard!**

We've added **new buttons** to make navigating your membership tools even easier:

Welcome To Your Membership Dashboard



Please note that some of the links are still under construction as we continue transitioning to our new software platform, **CharityEngine**.

?? Membership Renewals:

If you receive a renewal email, you can now access your renewal form directly through your dashboard or by clicking the link in the email.

?? Important Note for RENEWAL on Membership Display

The steps you take to **renew your membership** now mimic the "join" process. Don't be alarmed—your historical membership data from NEON has been successfully transferred to **CharityEngine**. The current renewal process is designed to help you **verify your contact information, Amtrak Guest Rewards preference, and communication settings**.

?? If your NEON membership was set to **auto-renew**, your membership will continue to auto-renew in CharityEngine as well. We encourage all members to **log in and review your account** to ensure everything looks correct.

You will be issued a **new RPA member number** through CharityEngine, but your original number is still valid. You're welcome to use **either number** when purchasing Amtrak tickets.

?? About Your New Member Number:

Your new membership number will contain **seven digits**.

?? **Only use the first SIX digits** if you're using your new CharityEngine number when prompted during an Amtrak ticket purchase. Amtrak hasn't updated their system yet to recognize the full 7-digit number.

?? Thank you for your patience as we continue working to enhance your member experience. We're committed to making the new portal smooth, intuitive, and reliable!

We Have Merch!





 Visit our Store

 Discuss This Week's Hotline

 Service Updates & Timetables

 Visit the General Membership Group

 View Webinars

 Rail Passengers' Social Media

Rail Passengers Timetables

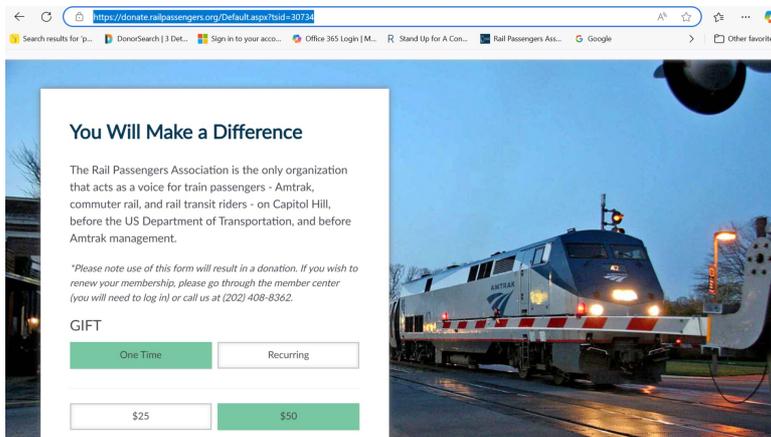
Thanks to a collaborative effort between Rail Passengers NYS Council Member Nathanael Nerode & juckins.net's Chris Juckins, we have been able to completely update our timetables resource page.

CLICK HERE

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>





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!

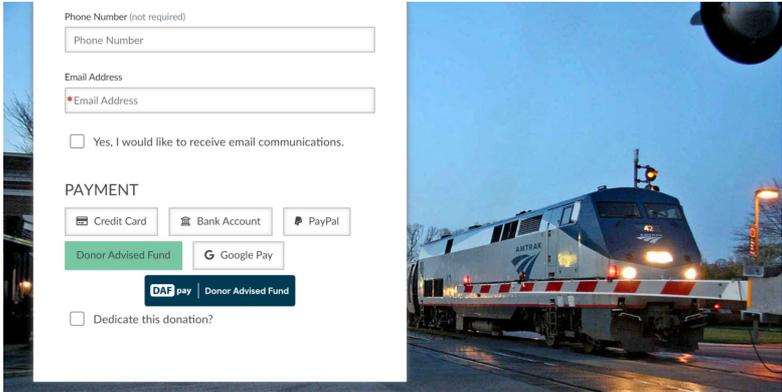
With multiple secure, protected methods of payment, you have more flexibility in the way dues are paid. Skip the hassle and [contact us](#) today for help setting up automatic or online payments.

- 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

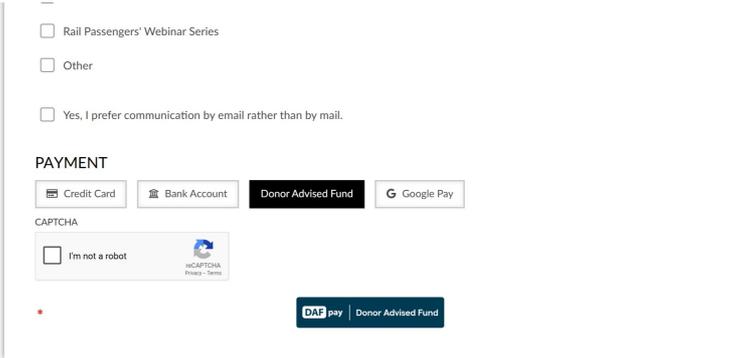
Use Your Donor Advised Fund (DAF) to Donate, Renew or Join Online

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.

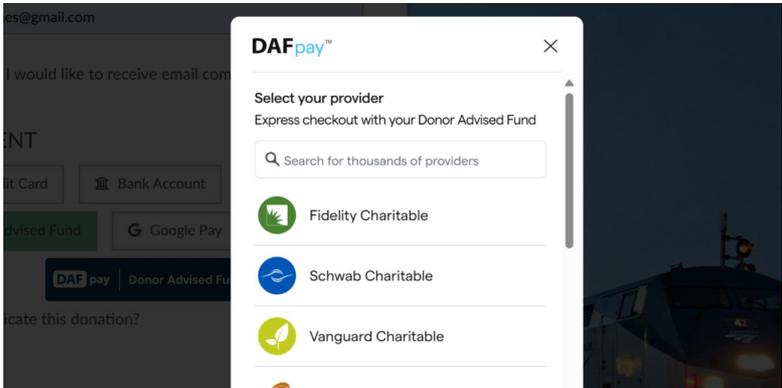
Donation Form:

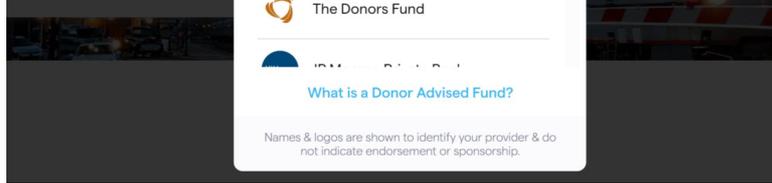


Membership Form:



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
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.



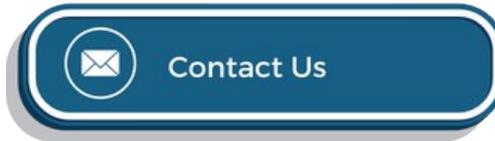
Rail Passengers Association members have access to a full service, nationwide federal credit union with extensive product and service offerings. Signature FCU is the exclusive provider of the [Rail Passengers Association-branded Visa credit card](#) with our logo, which supports our work by giving back 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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