

# RAILPASSENGERS



## WEEKLY HOTLINE

Issue #1,395–May 16, 2025



Take Action

### Association News

#### Extending Downeaster to Bangor Would Deliver \$61.7M In Benefits

Extending the state-supported Amtrak Downeaster service northward to Bangor and Orono could generate nearly \$62 million in annual economic benefits for the state of Maine, according to a new report released today by the Rail Passengers Association.

The research, conducted by Rail Passengers' in-house transportation analysis team and commissioned by The Maine Rail Group and Train Riders Northeast, reveals that even counties without train stations would see gains from improved mobility, higher visitor spending, new job creation, and reduced vehicle traffic. The proposed twice-daily extension would bring new service to Lewiston, Winthrop, Waterville, Pittsfield, Bangor, and Orono.

"Our team's work shows that all the right economic pre-conditions are in place for an extension of the Downeaster to be successful," said Jim Mathews, President & CEO of the Rail Passengers Association. "As we've seen with other state-supported expansions, such as Amtrak services in Virginia and the new Borealis service between Minneapolis-St. Paul and Chicago, demand often outstrips initial estimates and generates jobs, business, and prosperity. Vermont, which has half Maine's population, extended Amtrak service to Middlebury, Vergennes and Burlington in 2022, building three new station platforms, and expects to resume service to Montreal in 2026.

This initial analysis does not pretend to have all the answers, but it does show conclusively that an extension is worth a formal study and assessment under the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor Identification Program."

Key findings from the report include:

**\$61.7 million** in estimated annual statewide economic benefits.

More than **260,000 new riders** projected in the first year alone.

**\$15.5 million** in new visitor and traveler spending, supporting **191 new jobs**.

**\$12 million** in annual savings to passengers over other travel modes.

Nearly **\$10 million** in reduced road maintenance costs for Maine municipalities.

**\$2.4 million** in new annual state and local tax revenue.

Up to **5.9 million vehicle miles** removed from Maine roads annually.

The report also estimates that construction of new station facilities in Bangor and other towns would add an additional \$11.2 million in one-time economic benefits over a three- to five-year period.

The Rail Passengers Association developed its findings using its proprietary economic benefits modelling and ridership modelling tools, co-developed with the University of Southern Mississippi's Trent Lott National Center for Excellence in Economic Development and Entrepreneurship. Further

benefits were assessed using the IMPLAN input-output model, which is commonly used by Federal and state economic development agencies.

“This is not merely a transportation project; it is a statewide investment in mobility, tourism, education, healthcare access, and rural economic development,” the report concludes. “Downeaster service offers a modern connection that binds Maine’s communities, north and south, and ensures broader participation in its economic future.”

[CLICK HERE FOR THE PRESS RELEASE](#)

[CLICK HERE TO READ THE REPORT \(PDF\)](#)

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## Media Coverage

[VIDEO] [Amtrak expansion to Bangor and Orono discussed in report](#), WABI 5

[Study Backs Extension of Amtrak Downeaster to Bangor](#), WGAN

[VIDEO] [Study finds extension of Amtrak Downeaster to Bangor would boost Maine economy](#), WMTW 8

[VIDEO] [Rail advocates push for expanded Amtrak Downeaster service](#), WGME 13

## Transportation Secretary Faces Questions on Grant Delays, Amtrak

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

Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy faced tough questions from senators looking for answers about the pace of processing grants approved under the Biden Administration, the need to overhaul the nation’s Air Traffic Control system in the wake of a series of serious incidents, and the need for more clarity about the Trump Administration’s budget request during [today’s hearing by Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development](#).

### "Skinny" Budget Raises Questions

The hearing, chaired by Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS), was convened to review the President’s fiscal year 2026 budget request for the Department of Transportation. Senator Chris Coons (D-DE), referencing [the May 2nd release of the White House’s “skinny” budget](#), sought a commitment to continued support of Amtrak operations.

“I do hope we will get your actual full budget soon and have a chance to review that with you,” said Senator Coons. “And when we do get it, I hope we will see sustained investment in Amtrak.”

Coons pointed to recent positive milestones for the railroad, including last year’s record ridership and revenue. He also highlighted the Northeast Corridor’s (NEC) strong revenue performance, while warning that any cuts to NEC service—or, referencing comments made earlier this by Elon Musk, attempts to privatize the railroad—would really harm the “heartland states and rural parts of Amtrak’s national network” through destabilization of the railroad’s finances.

Secretary Duffy responded that he was committed to providing great rail service along the NEC and is open to the idea of competition. However, he emphasized that the question of how Amtrak operates is a question for Congress to decide.

“I take Amtrak as well, I ride the Northeast Corridor... I do think we could be better,” said Secretary Duffy. “...I’m committed to the idea that we want to be able to move people along the Northeast Corridor, we don’t have enough room for people to all take cars, so let’s figure out a better way to do it.”

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

## Senate Consider Rail Noms, Looking at Safety and Expansion

[By Sean Jeans-Gail, VP of Gov't Affairs + Policy](#)

The Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, chaired by Senator Ted Cruz (R-Texas), [convened a hearing yesterday](#) to evaluate Trump Administration nominees for key positions within the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the Amtrak Board of Directors. The hearing

spotlighted the qualifications of Mr. David Fink, nominated to lead the FRA, and Mr. Robert Gleason, nominated to serve on Amtrak's Board, as lawmakers probed their views on rail safety,

Gleason, a Pennsylvania native and the former Chair of the Pennsylvania Republican Party, underscored his personal history with rail travel, recounting the once-thriving passenger service in his hometown of Johnstown, and how the decline of this connection mirrored the decline of his Johnstown:

*In the first half of the twentieth century, my hometown of Johnstown was connected to the rest of the world by the Pennsylvania Railroad. Trains with iconic names like the Red Arrow, Broadway Limited, the Fort Pitt, and the Cleavelander—25 daily passenger trains—all stopped in Johnstown. I was a regular rail passenger traveling back and forth to Philadelphia to attend the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Finance and Commerce.*

*Our town was bypassed by the interstate highway system, and most airlines overflew us. The region began a downhill slide. As passenger train service dwindled, we are now only served by two trains a day.*

*In addition to my personal experiences with the benefits of rail connections and the potentially devastating effects of a community not being on the main transportation grid, I am honored to be nominated to join the Amtrak Board and continue in public service. My civilian government experience makes me well-qualified for the role of Amtrak director.*

He pointed to his track record of working to build a better rail system in America, while also expressing concern over the decline in rail connectivity in the U.S., saying that—when it's executed properly—passenger rail does more than just move people, it drives prosperity:

*In 1982, I was appointed to one of the first state government committees in the nation to study high-speed rail. The 9-member committee was appointed by Governor Thornburgh with a charge to study the feasibility of constructing a high-speed passenger rail line from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh. This wonderful experience will certainly help me as a member of the Amtrak board.*

*Economically, passenger rail can be a powerful engine for growth. Delivering a rail project generates thousands of construction, engineering, and operational jobs. Once operational, trains attract riders who spend money in local economies, especially near stations. Entire communities can be revitalized by the presence of reliable train service.*

**"It is clear from his testimony and from his responsiveness to inquiries from members of the committee that Mr. Gleason would be an excellent addition to the Amtrak Board of Directors," said Rail Passengers' President & CEO Jim Mathews. "It is refreshing to see someone with such a firm understanding that passenger trains are economic engines for the towns they serve. We support Mr. Gleason and Mr. Fink's nomination and urge the Senate to confirm them with all due haste."**

[\[TO READ MORE, CLICK HERE\]](#)

## NJ Transit Engineers on Strike

### Key Updates:

The strike began at 12:01 a.m. this morning after NJ Transit and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) failed to reach a new contract agreement

Talks collapsed late Thursday night after about 15 hours of bargaining. The union claims NJ Transit walked away from the table around 10 p.m., effectively triggering the strike.

All NJ Transit rail services are suspended, affecting over 172,000 weekday riders, including commuters to New York City

### Contingency Plans:

Bus service remains operational and will be enhanced starting Monday, May 19 to support essential travel. PATH trains, Amtrak, private buses, ferries, and carpooling are recommended alternatives for commuters.

New Jersey Governor Murphy urged engineers to return to the negotiating table, emphasizing that the strike will ["upend the lives of hundreds of thousands of New Jerseyans"](#)

As of this writing, no new negotiation sessions have been scheduled, and the strike is expected to continue indefinitely unless both sides return to the bargaining table.

## 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.**

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## 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!

#### **[\[Podcast\] Episode 3. Amtrak's Genesis and the Ongoing Struggle to Reclaim the Public Purpose of Passenger Rail \(Part 2\)](#)**

Please check out the latest episode of the excellent Reconnecting America series from our friends at Solutionary Rail - featuring a conversation w/ our Chairwoman Meredith Richards.

#### **[Amtrak Board of Directors to Hold Public Meeting, Amtrak Media](#)**

The Amtrak Board of Directors is holding a public meeting on May 22nd. Click the link above for more information and to register.

#### **[Efforts to build high-speed rail could slow down under Trump, Marketplace](#)**

Our VP of Government Affairs, Sean Jeans-Gail, is quoted in this Marketplace piece on how plans for a HSR network in the US could suffer under the current administration.

#### **[50 Years of Amfleet, Passenger Train Journal](#)**

PTJ goes in-depth to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the very first delivery of the Budd Company made Amfleet cars from their WWII-era Red Lion plant in the northeast Philly suburbs.

#### **[100 years ago, the first trains pulled into Union Station, Chicago Tribune](#)**

*"Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work..."* - Daniel Burnham

Part of Burnham's 1909 "Plan of Chicago", at the cost of \$75M (\$1.3B today) and taking 12 years to complete, Chicago's grand Union Station turns 100 this week.

#### **[Final grant approved for Springfield Rail Improvements Project, NPR Illinois](#)**

Track realignment, grade crossing separations, signal upgrades, and a brand new multimodal transportation center are all part of this \$157M multiphase project in Illinois' capital city along the Chicago to St Louis corridor.

### [Elon Musk's Boring Company Is in Talks With Government Over Amtrak Project](#), **New York Times**

For the record, The Boring Company has more canceled projects (7) than they have completed (1).

### [The Early Returns on NYC's Congestion Pricing Are Pretty Impressive](#), **Gizmodo**

In the four months since NYC started charging \$9 to drive into Manhattan:

Traffic is down 12% (car-related accidents are down 14%)  
Vehicle speed is up 20% during peak hours  
Bus ridership is up 13%  
Subway ridership is up 8%  
Commuter rail ridership is up  
Taxi use is up  
Bike sharing use is up

### [California High-Speed Rail's plan to right itself](#), **The Urban Condition**

Newly appointed CEO Ian Choudri has expressed optimism that California High-Speed Rail will be poised for a significant turnaround - with a plan to secure private funding to complete the Bay Area and Los Angeles segments of the project.

### [Amtrak's Crayon-Covered Train Offers Free Rides And Family Deals This Summer](#), **Secret NYC**

Learn more about the colorful new partnership between Amtrak and the 122-year-old Crayola company.



[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

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

**FEATURED SESSION**  
HOW TO: Integrate Rail  
into Your Corporate Travel Program  
See you there?

**GBTA** Summit 2025 | Sustainability Summit  
Washington DC, June 10

**Jim Mathews**  
President & CEO  
Rail Passengers Association

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](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!

## 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**, after a few meetings in his DC office on Tuesday, met with Amtrak leadership to discuss potential enhancements to Association membership benefits, traveled to Maine's statehouse in Augusta to deliver an economic-benefits assessment before Transportation committee legislators, and wrapped up the week appearing alongside American Public Transportation Association VP Art Guzzetti at the Virginia High Speed Rail Association's virtual Town Hall on rail passenger issues at the Federal level.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, spent the week coordinating with Congressional offices on three Committee hearings that touched on passenger rail policy and budgeting, while speaking with reporters about how the recent round of Amtrak firings could potentially impact passengers.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, continued working with our Accounting partners to prepare for the FY23 audit and closing financials. Processing membership dues and donations sent to the DC office, creating upcoming fundraising messages, and tending to the Association's administrative/operational needs were also on this week's to-do list.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, spent a part of the week joining Jonsie interviewing potential summer interns from The Fund for American Studies (TFAS) program. Joe also staffed Jim, remotely, while he was in Maine to present the findings of our economic ridership study.
- **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**, spent the week chatting with several Association donors - thank you for your support! We are also preparing for the Railway Interiors Innovation Summit in Orlando.

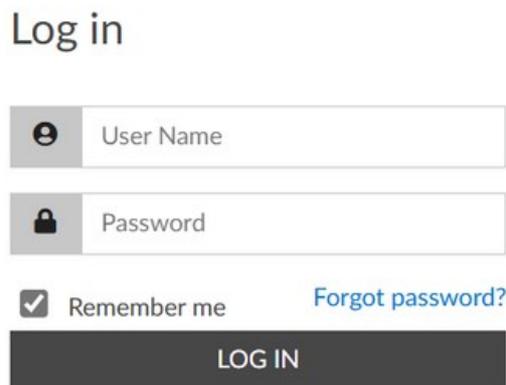
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Starting **Wednesday, February 19th**, all membership, donation, and event registration transactions are being processed through **CharityEngine**. **Neon** is no longer the Association's CRM of record.

?? 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

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](mailto: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!

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## We Have Merch!





## Rail Passengers Timetables

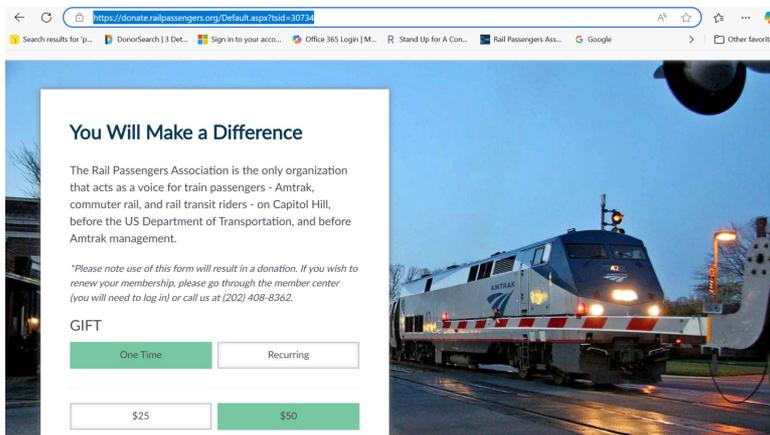
Thanks to a collaborative effort between Rail Passengers NYS Council Member Nathanael Nerode & [juckins.net](http://juckins.net)'s Chris Juckins, we have been able to completely update our timetables resource page.

[CLICK HERE](#)

## 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!

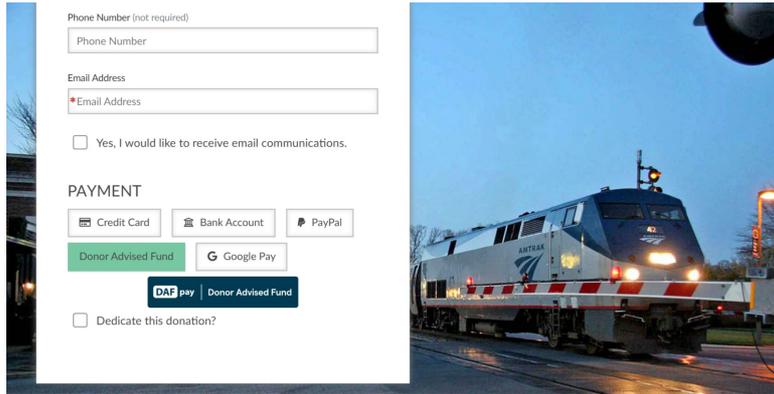
With multiple secure, protected methods of payment, you have more flexibility in the way dues are paid. Skip the hassle and [contact us](#) today for help setting up automatic or online payments.

- 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:



Phone Number (not required)  
Phone Number

Email Address  
\*Email Address

Yes, I would like to receive email communications.

PAYMENT

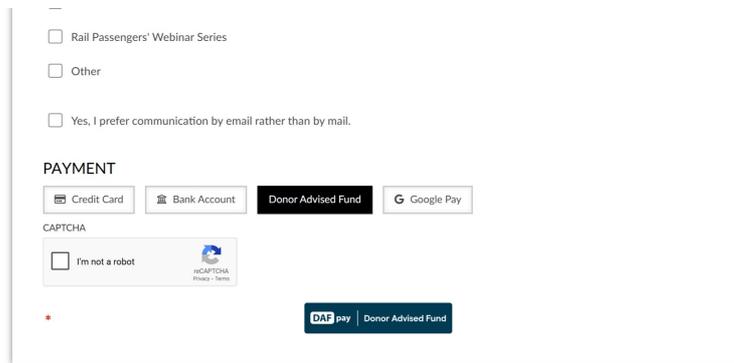
Credit Card  Bank Account  PayPal

Donor Advised Fund  Google Pay

**DAF pay Donor Advised Fund**

Dedicate this donation?

### Membership Form:



Rail Passengers' Webinar Series

Other

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

PAYMENT

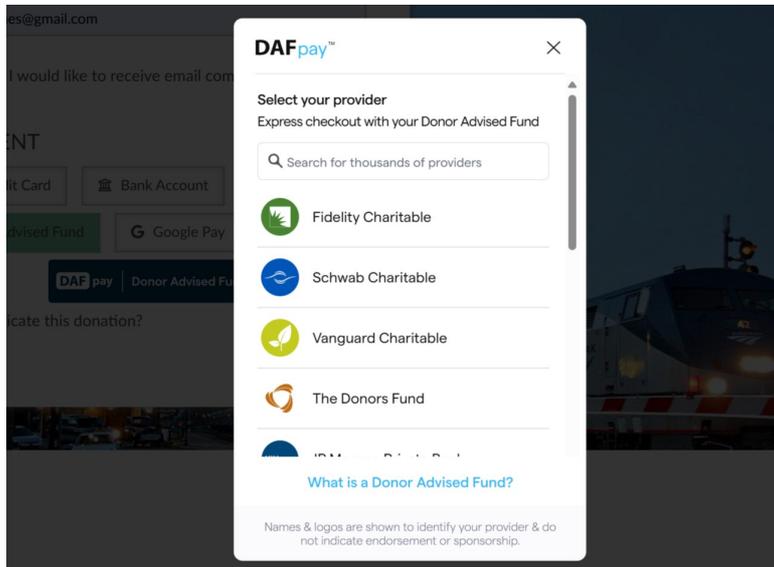
Credit Card  Bank Account  Donor Advised Fund  Google Pay

CAPTCHA

I'm not a robot

**DAF pay Donor Advised Fund**

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.



es@gmail.com

I would like to receive email com

NT

it Card  Bank Account

vised Fund  Google Pay

**DAF pay Donor Advised Fu**

ate this donation?

**DAFpay™**

Select your provider

Express checkout with your Donor Advised Fund

Search for thousands of providers

- Fidelity Charitable
- Schwab Charitable
- Vanguard Charitable
- The Donors Fund

[What is a Donor Advised Fund?](#)

Names & logos are shown to identify your provider & do not indicate endorsement or sponsorship.

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

National Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc.  
dba Rail Passengers Association  
1200 G Street, NW  
Suite 520  
Washington, DC 20005  
Contact: Jonsie Stone, jstone@narprail.org  
Tax ID: 36-2615221

## Member & Donor Notices

- **The Rail Passengers Association is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. Our federal tax identification number is 36-2615221**

- **To help facilitate dissemination of electronic thank you receipts,** please make sure your contact information, **specifically your email address,** is up-to-date in your Neon profile.
- **If you need assistance with your membership,** please call the Office at 202-408-8362.
- **While our staff continues to work remotely, we are unable to provide permanent membership cards.** You can print a temporary membership card by creating an account at [www.railpassengers.org](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](#).

**If you have questions, feedback, or submissions for next week's hotline, send us your thoughts! Help us spread the word about your local, regional, and national passenger rail wins.**



**THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS:**



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EST. 1967

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