



Photo Credit: Steve Vagnozzi



THURSDAY HOTLINE
#1440

MAY 21ST, 2026



May 25, 2026

MEMORIAL DAY

HONORING THOSE WHO SERVED

"All we have of freedom, all we use or know—
This our fathers bought for us long and long ago."

— Rudyard Kipling



RAIL PASSENGERS
ASSOCIATION

Notice: The Rail Passengers office will be closed starting at Noon Eastern on Friday, May 22nd until 9:00a on Tuesday, May 26th in observation of the Memorial Day holiday.

Association News

Inside the BUILD America 250 Act: Good Policies, Critical Funding Shortfalls

by Joe Aiello / Director of Community Engagement & Organizing

The House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee recently introduced the **Building Unrivaled Infrastructure and Long-term Development for America's 250th (BUILD America 250) Act**, a draft proposal for surface transportation reauthorization.

Sean Jeans-Gail, Rail Passengers' VP of Government Affairs + Policy, has conducted a thorough analysis of the bill's rail-related sections, highlighting the Association's stance on several important topics. Although the draft contains constructive policy updates, the projected funding levels present a significant threat to the survival of the national passenger rail network. Jim Mathews, the Association's President & CEO, stated, "Without reliable funding and a clear commitment to growth, this bill is not enough to earn our endorsement."

Our evaluation is detailed in the two-part series outlined below. We invite you to follow the links for a comprehensive breakdown of the legislation.

[Part 1: The Fiscal Crisis](#)

While the BUILD America 250 Act appears to authorize **\$63.9B for rail over five years**, there is a critical caveat: **this funding is not guaranteed**. Departing from the precedent set by the IIJA, the act places all funding at the mercy of the annual congressional appropriations process. Given that appropriators have historically failed to secure even a fraction of that amount for rail, the lack of dedicated revenue could lead to an **80% drop in actual funding** relative to current levels.

The legislation also complicates the Corridor Identification and Development (CID) Program by imposing more rigorous non-federal match requirements and additional bureaucracy, potentially stalling the 69 expansion projects currently in development.

Looking for a deep dive into the financial and grant data? [Read the full analysis in Part 1.](#)

[Part 2: Impacts on Passengers and Amtrak](#)

The bill emphasizes an Amtrak strategy focused on "economic performance" and reduced federal reliance, which effectively reverses language established in the IIJA.

Notable policy shifts include:

- **Accountability & Oversight:** Introducing open-meeting and FOIA requirements for Amtrak's Board during federal grant administration, plus mandated disclosure of executive pay.
- **Auditing & Infrastructure:** Directing the Inspector General to review [Amtrak's route accounting \(the APT system\)](#) and ensuring recommendations for the infrastructure backlog are prioritized.
- **Safety & Amenities:** Mandating baby changing tables on new rolling stock (simply codifying something is already happening) and strengthening workforce protection plans to prevent assaults.
- **Corridor Studies & Legal Caps:** Authorizing feasibility studies for specific routes like Austin to Monterrey and Scranton to NYC, and lowers the [federal liability limit](#) for rail incidents to \$323M.

To understand how these changes might affect your travel experience, [click here to read Part 2 in full.](#)

The Bottom Line

BUILD America 250 contains plenty of smart, well-intentioned policy tweaks - many of which passenger advocates have long fought for. However, a policy framework without dedicated capital is like a new car without an engine. Without guaranteed funding, the progress made over the last few years is at serious risk of grinding to a halt.

Three Cheers For The Molly Wee

by Jim Mathews / President & CEO

Only a year after being parachuted in to take over a flailing project and flanked by DOT Secretary Sean Duffy and Deputy DOT Secretary Stephen Bradbury, Andy "Train Daddy" Byford this week [announced selection of a Master Developer team](#) to lead the effort to transform NY Penn Station.

Better yet, he said we'll see actual construction begin within a year.

"Everyone at Amtrak is thrilled to announce Penn Transformation Partners and even more excited that the project is one step closer to having shovels in the ground next year," said Byford, whose official title is now Special Advisor to the Amtrak Board. "The rapid completion of a rigorous procurement process represents more than just delivering on a highly ambitious milestone; it demonstrates that Amtrak and USDOT are uniquely capable of making this vision a reality."

Andy, you're being modest: there are lot of people who would argue that [YOU are the only one "uniquely capable" of pulling this program off](#) after decades of delay and a pile of politics unlike anything anywhere else in America. Now, this being New York City, everyone will have commentary, pro and con, and I'll share my own thoughts below. But first, the details before we move on.

The joint venture of Halmar and Skanska, called Penn Transformation Partners, will build a new station inspired by the original Penn Station that was demolished in the 1960s, bringing back classic design while fitting with the major structures already in place, namely Madison Square Garden and Moynihan Train Hall, USDOT officials said in a press release.

Station plans include a new grand entrance on Eighth Avenue to a new train hall, open concourses, expanded track capacity, new retail locations, better wayfinding and improvements to the existing subterranean structure.

As a New Yorker, and a member of the [New York Penn Station Working](#)

[Advisory Group, or SWAG](#), I'm overjoyed to see how well Andy has unstuck this perpetually stalled effort, and even more happy to see that they were able to come up with a way to increase NYP's capacity for trains per hour without physically enlarging the existing station complex beyond the streets it now touches: 31st street to the south and 33rd street to the north, as well as Ninth Ave. to the west and Seventh Ave. to the east.

It's an especially notable achievement when you consider that **our working group was briefed in Fall of 2024 that this was an impossible goal and that, in any case, work would not be able to begin for the better part of a decade.**

What a difference 12 months of Byford's leadership made...

[Click Here To Read More](#)

Rail Passengers Association Thanks Amtrak CEO Roger Harris for His Tenure As He Announces His Exit

Amtrak announced this week that Chief Executive Officer Roger Harris will depart Amtrak on July 31, at which point Byl Herrmann will lead the company as Interim President while the Board conducts a search for a permanent CEO.

"On behalf of our members, I want to extend our thanks to Roger for his work on behalf of America's passengers," said Jim Mathews, President and CEO of Rail Passengers. "Roger's seven years with Amtrak have included some of the most critical points in the railroad's history—from ridership records to an almost-total shutdown of the network during the pandemic, back to new ridership records. We wish him well in his next chapter."

Amtrak Board Chair Tony Coscia highlighted Herrmann's impressive reserve of experience with the railroad, emphasizing he'll oversee a smooth transition as the railroad looks to conduct a search for his replacement.

"Byl Herrmann is a natural fit to lead Amtrak for what's directly ahead of us," wrote Coscia. "Byl is a 27-year veteran of Amtrak, with a deep knowledge of Law, HR, Labor and our business lines. As Interim President, Byl will work closely with the Board and executive leadership team to maintain continuity, support our workforce, and keep our focus on safe, reliable service, and delivering on our commitments to customers, partners, and the communities we serve."

We are on Substack!



Rail Passengers Association

Read and subscribe at
railpassengers.substack.com



Giving you new opportunities to interact with us. Read, comment, and chat! We are working on adding new contributors to write exclusive blogs for the site and throwing around ideas for more content (podcast, anyone?)

[Check It Out Here!](#)

Field Notes

Please email [Joe Aiello](mailto:Joe.Aiello@narprail.org) 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.

Lumo, Britain's Low-Cost Railway Set to Open New Rail Line Between London and Scotland

By Philip Mayer / Association Volunteer Blogger

European railways continue to offer more low-cost rail lines as Lumo is set to open a new line on the western side of Great Britain between Stirling and London's Euston Station. Stirling is a city in central Scotland, roughly 26 miles northeast of Glasgow and 37 miles northwest of Edinburgh. Lumo has offered a rail line on the eastern side of the island of Great Britain between Edinburgh and London since October 2021. Lumo is operated by First Rail Open Access, which also operates Hull Trains.

The rail line will service London Euston, Milton Keynes, Nuneaton, Crewe, Preston, Carlisle, Lockerbie, Motherwell, Whifflet, Greenfaulds, Larbert and Stirling. This will be the first direct rail line to London for Whifflet, Greenfaulds and Larbert, making transportation significantly easier for residents of those cities.

The service is set to begin on May 25, with one train in each direction. Four additional trains will be phased out later this summer. One way tickets start at just £29.90. The lowest priced ticket on an LNER (London North Eastern Railway) train is £33.80. Last minute tickets on Lumo can cost as much as £75.90. Trains on the new western route will have five cars and one single class for the 5.5 hour journey.

To promote the new rail line, Lumo partnered with Stirling Pride and local drag performer Cherry West, giving away free "golden tickets" to residents of the city. Lumo also partnered with Preston Caribbean Carnival to promote its new train station. There was an elaborate parade to celebrate the new rail line and the creation of around 100 new jobs. Stuart Jones, Managing Director of First Rail Open Access, said: "This is a very exciting moment in our journey to launching a pioneering new service for the West Coast. Customers can look forward to simple, low-cost fares with an excellent experience on our services between Scotland, the North West of England and London.

Lumo is able to charge less for its trips because it takes a no-frills approach. Tickets must be purchased online and there are no staff at stations to facilitate transactions. Travelers have commented that the cabins are more crowded and the seats less comfortable than on LNER trains. Inadequate luggage space is another frequent complaint.

There are no dining cars, but passengers can order food, including hot meals via a QR code to be delivered by an attendant. An attendant will also move through the trains with a trolley of snacks and beverages for passengers to purchase. Lumo trains differ from other European low-cost railways as they do offer food and last minute tickets can be purchased.

Perhaps the biggest chance passengers take when choosing Lumo is the risk of cancellation. Its 5 car trains are often at or near capacity. If a train is delayed or cancelled, passengers are pushed to the next available train. This can lead to extremely overcrowded trains, often running at standing room only.

Lumo, whose name is a combination of "luminosity" for innovation and "motion" was launched as a competitor to EasyJet, a low cost airline. Low-cost travel, whether in the air or on the rails necessarily comes with some expectations of compromise for the passengers. The fact that Lumo is expanding with a western route between Scotland and England shows that there is increasing demand for low-cost train travel and train travel in general. Perhaps such an innovation will soon come to the United States.

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 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!

[LIRR strike ends as MTA reaches deal with unions after chaotic commute](#), Gothamist

While details are still not public and the agreement must be ratified by both the union members and the MTA Board, the worker strike has ended after three days and service resumed on Wednesday morning.

[Amtrak's Borealis surpasses expectations for second year](#), Progressive Railroading

Yada yada yada, if you build it, yada yada...

[Amtrak's new Airo train arrives in Seattle, kicking off sweeping U.S. rail upgrade](#), WFAA

The first brand-new Airo train set, to be used for Cascades service, has officially made it home to Seattle over the weekend.

[A rail merger could force Alabamian farmers out of business](#), AL Reporter

The proposed UP/NS merger could hurt more than just passenger rail service.

[MBTA, Boston clash over proposed street closure near South Station ahead of World Cup matches](#), Boston 25

The City of Boston is calling for the MBTA's planned closure of Summer Street to be a "last resort", but the agency plans to move forward no matter what city officials say.

[Amtrak Berkshire rail line to return for summer](#), News 10

The NYC to Pittsfield, MA seasonal weekend service returns on June 12th



**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

Association Events



We have updated our agenda and sponsors pages. Check them out!

[Click Here For Our New RailNation Website](#)

Local Meetings + Events

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!

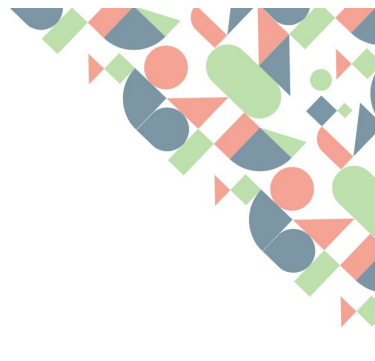
Staff Updates

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**, kicked off his work week on Sunday, when the House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee dropped the text of its proposed five-year surface authorization to replace the historic Investment in Infrastructure and Jobs Act. Jim spent a few hours with the bill text, and handed off to Sean Jeans-Gail, who has been keeping our coalition up to date online with multiple analyses and updates.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, is STILL busy with Thursday's markup of the surface bill...so there's no time for an update!
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, processed membership dues and donations sent directly to the DC office, worked with the auditors to provide requested information, wrote fundraising messages, tended to the Association's administrative/operational needs.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, took part in a number of meetings this week, including catching up with one of our incoming summer interns on his trip from Wichita to DC, a coalition meeting on the issue of commuter rail insurance liability limits, and joined Jim in a call with the Lake Erie West transportation committee.
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, continues to support constituents with renewals, new memberships, User Center access issues, and password resets. When requesting a password reset, please be sure to check your junk or spam folder, as these emails can occasionally be filtered; marking us as a safe sender can help prevent this. When logging into your User Portal, we encourage you to review and update your communication preferences and mailing address as needed. To avoid duplicate accounts, each member should have a unique email address associated with their membership.

Apply for Volunteer Staff at Rail Passengers Association

**VOLUNTEERS
NEEDED**



railpassengers.org/volunteer

Rail Passengers Association

[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE!](#)

Membership How-To

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

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

We Have Merch!

New items available!





 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



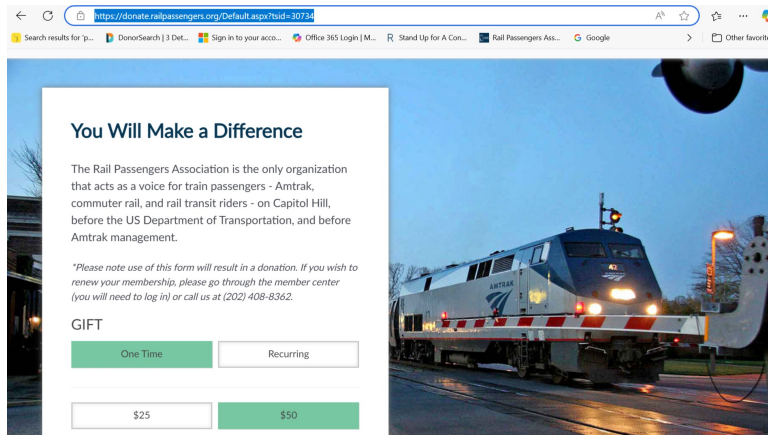
Our Timetables Manager, Chris Jukins, has created a spring update for us. He is still working on a few stragglers, but we should have those up soon.

[CLICK HERE](#)

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>



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!

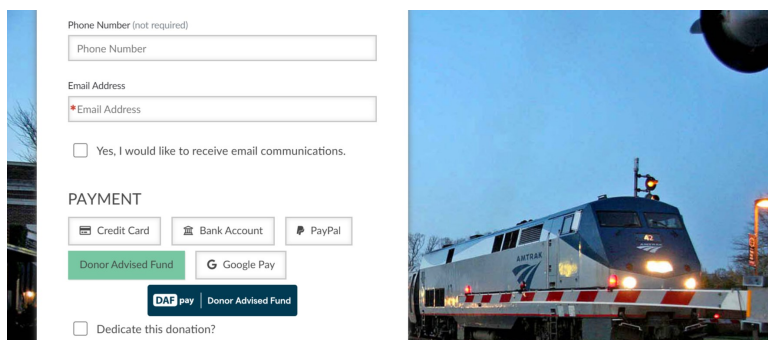
With multiple secure, protected methods of payment, you have more flexibility in the way dues are paid. Skip the hassle and [contact us](#) today for help setting up automatic or online payments.

- 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:

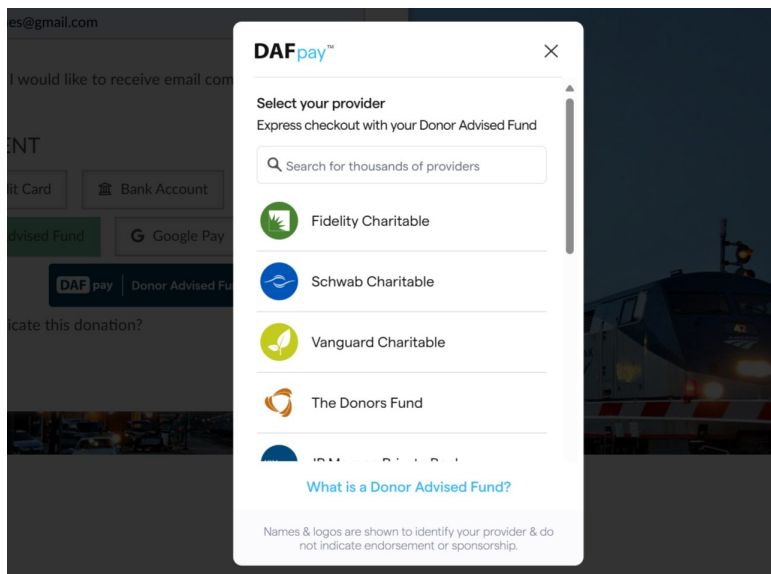


Membership Form:

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
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.

Charity Navigator



◆ THREE-STAR ◆

2026

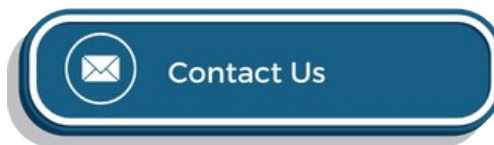
Rail Passengers Association Earns 3-Star Rating from Charity Navigator

Rail Passengers Association's strong financial health and commitment to accountability and transparency have earned it a 3-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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