



Photo credit: Maximilian Pohlenz



FRIDAY HOTLINE  
**#1402**

JULY 18<sup>TH</sup>, 2025



Take Action

## Association News

### Questions Loom as House Committee Passes Transportation Budget

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

The House Committee on Appropriations passed its [Fiscal Year 2026 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies \(THUD\) bill](#) today, providing a total of \$89.9 billion—or \$4.46 billion (4.7%) below the Fiscal Year 2025 enacted level. The Republican-led committee [voted to advance the bill along a party-line vote of 35 to 28](#).

[As we reported earlier this week](#), the bill provides solid funding levels for select rail programs—including \$2.31 billion for Amtrak and \$538.4 million for the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program. **However**, the bill pays for next year's operations via the raiding of funds provided by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) for expansion and upgrades to the intercity passenger rail network.

"Investments maintain vital missions while advancing fiscal discipline through the elimination of wasteful and duplicative initiatives," said Chairman Tom Cole (R-OK)—referencing, in part, cuts to the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail (FSP) Grant Program, which provides funding for capital projects that address state of good repair, improve performance, and expand or establish new intercity passenger rail service.

Specifically, the House THUD bill:

**Transfers \$2.3 billion** in advanced appropriations from FY26 FSP advanced appropriations to pay for Amtrak operations;

**Draws \$500 million** in FY26 FSP advanced appropriations to fund CRISI grants, which are used for freight and passenger rail upgrades; and

**Rescinds \$75 million** in unobligated FY25 FSP funding.

These cuts to future investments in passenger rail infrastructure, along with cuts to transit investment, drew rebukes from the Democratic minority.

"[This] bill strips away critical investments in housing and community development while cutting Amtrak and other critical transportation resources, putting more commuters on the road, and adding more delays getting to work," said Appropriations Committee Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro (D-CT).

While the bill takes a better approach to Amtrak operations [than the House GOP has outlined in years past](#), it is still disappointing to see desperately-needed investment in increased capacity, increased frequencies, new equipment, and new routes raided to keep the trains running over the coming fiscal year.

"Rail Passengers Association appreciates the Committee's recognition that Amtrak and CRISI are important transportation programs that deserve to be funded," said Jim Mathews, President & CEO. "However, we cannot condone an approach which robs future generations of passengers of a sustainable

and reliable rail network to keep today's trains running. We find it noteworthy that the reduction in advanced appropriations for passenger rail is roughly equivalent to the *increase* in spending for the Federal Aviation Administration in this year's THUD bill, given that our nation's air traffic control system is a cautionary tale about the consequences of deferred capital investment."

[CLICK HERE TO CONTINUE READING](#)

## Disability Steps Improve Access For Everyone

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

Sometimes in this job, I have to say things that people don't like. More often than not, [it's saying things to Amtrak that they don't like](#). Other times, it's saying things to members of Congress that they don't like. And every once in a while I run into that uncomfortable moment when I even have to say something to a small handful of donors, supporters, or dues-paying Association members that THEY don't like.

This is one of those times. And I'm sure it really IS just a small handful. But I can't stay silent.

Earlier this week, [I reported to all of you about efforts by the Amtrak Office of Inspector General](#) to make sure Amtrak – a public, taxpayer-supported entity – is the doing the best it practically can do for the disabled passengers it serves. To its great credit, Amtrak responded thoughtfully to the auditors' findings and recommendations, and is taking steps to address the issues the auditors raised.

As is our regular practice, we republished our article to our social media channels. Although many of the comments were ordinary, others were appalling.

Like this one: "Regular citizens first."

That, especially, really shocked me. "Regular citizens." One in seven Americans has a disability. And because flying and driving can be particularly difficult or impossible for them, disabled passengers make up an outsize fraction of Amtrak's ridership, a lot more than one in seven Amtrak riders. Among our own members, donors, and supporters, that share is likely higher still.

They're citizens. They're taxpayers. They paid their fares. They're every bit as "regular" as you are.

And, more precisely, those kinds of comments made it crystal-clear to me that those commenters didn't even read the article. Like Pavlov's dogs, they saw the word "disabilities" in the headline and started rage-typing at their keyboards about wheelchairs. No reading required.

If they HAD read the article, they would have understood that much of what's under discussion is not about aisle-width, but instead is about making the Amtrak app work better for people who are blind, or audiovisual messaging in stations, or interactions with Amtrak employees – 39 percent of the complaints the Inspector General reviewed were about poor assistance with getting on or off trains at stations.

[TO CONTINUE READING JIM'S THOUGHTS, CLICK HERE](#)

---

## Field Notes

**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@narprail.org](mailto:jaiello@narprail.org) with the subject "HOTLINE PHOTO"**

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

## [Amtrak service to Berkshire County suspended for the summer, WNYT](#)

Service between Boston & Albany, NY is suspended until September due to unstable ground near Schodack. Buses will replace trains on the Lake Shore Limited and Berkshire Flyer.

## [Ohio continues to plan new Amtrak routes to Columbus despite obstacles, WOSU Public Media](#)

Decades of planning, hostile elected officials, and funding shortfalls - yet advocates still want their "seat at the table" and continue to fight for passenger rail in the Buckeye State.

## [Amtrak reaches new milestone with Twin Cities to Chicago Borealis route, MPR News](#)

Just 14 months into service - and the Borealis has already surpassed a quarter million riders.

## [Justice Department and Norfolk Southern near settlement deal in Amtrak Crescent case, Trains](#)

The Justice Department and Norfolk Southern have reached a settlement in principle over allegations that NS failed to give Amtrak's Crescent train priority over freight traffic—violating federal law and delaying passengers.

## [Visit Mobile talks tourism with local businesses ahead of Amtrak Mardi Gras service, NBC 15](#)

Visit Mobile and the Downtown Mobile Alliance are all in for the upcoming Mardi Gras service - and both are looking forward to showing off the Port City when passengers come through.

## [MTA set ridership, on-time performance records in 2025's first half, Progressive Railroading](#)

bUt nO OnE TaKeS PuBcLiC TrAnSiT

## [Local officials advocating to keep Hamilton Amtrak stop on track, Journal-News](#)

Local leaders are pushing hard to secure a stop on the proposed 3C+D Amtrak line, connecting Cleveland to Cincinnati via Columbus and Dayton. With Hamilton and Sharonville both in the running, community voices are now more important than ever.

## [Officials pledge commuter rail to Boulder, Longmont by 2029, Times-Call](#)

Backed by local and state leaders, the project is part of a broader vision to enhance multimodal transportation along Colorado's Front Range corridor.

## [4 Michigan Amtrak Day Trips on the Pere Marquette Line, Awesome Mitten](#)

From lakeshore views and historic downtowns to local wineries and museums, each stop along the route offers a curated experience ideal for leisure travelers and weekend explorers alike.



[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

### RailNation: San Antonio





**[REGISTER NOW!](#)**

## Get Your Half-Off RailNation: San Antonio Rate!

Ready for a full weekend of learning, inspiration, and action? The contracts are signed, the venue is booked, the speaker invitations are out the door, and we're getting ready to enjoy a great time together in San Antonio from October 3rd through October 5th on the famous Riverwalk!

This year's [RailNation: San Antonio conference](#) gathers grassroots advocates, transportation professionals, and elected leaders from across the country. We'll explore progress in places like [the Gulf Coast](#) and the MSP-Chicago corridor with the Borealis, as well as [Brightline's rapid expansion](#), and how those stories can be replicated nationwide. We're putting together panel discussions on local transportation issues in Texas, presentations on the [Heartland Flyer](#), talks from top Amtrak leaders, a deep discussion with Amtrak and Brightline about taking care of customers, and so much more.

**Anyone can come, and we hope that you'll join us!** You don't have to be a [Rail Passengers member](#). You don't have to be a Rail Passengers Council member. You don't have to be a member of leadership. If you want more and better trains, your voice – working right where you live, work, or play – is how we'll make it happen, together.

And that's why **YOU** should come to San Antonio to get the latest updates, hear directly from rail leaders face-to-face, and to learn from fellow advocates about strategies that have worked around the country to get new trains running.

We've also tried very hard this year to make attendance more affordable for everyone – younger advocates, folks with families, fixed-income retirees, students. **Hotels and meeting rooms unavoidably cost money, but thanks to some sponsorships and hard work by the professional staff, for a limited time only we can offer a full three-day in-person registration for just \$96. (In-person, not virtual!)**

That's three days of presentations, conversations, and talking directly with top rail leaders and policymakers about how we break the logjams that stop us from getting more trains, to more places, for more people, everywhere. All for 50 percent off the regular registration rate.

Our Fall conferences in the past have sometimes had to cost upwards of \$300 per attendee, and that puts it out of reach for a lot of people. That's why we've tried so hard to wring the best deals out of the hotels and suppliers, and to pare down every penny to make it easier for our grassroots rail supporters to take part.

The "Early Bird" rate of \$96 is only good until the end of July. Starting August 1, registration for the in-person event will be at the regular rate of \$192. That's still more affordable than some of our previous conferences, but why not act quickly to get 50 percent off?

Here's how to do it: visit our [online registration page, here](#). Enter the number of event tickets you'll need – one for each attendee. Enter your contact information, too.

If you'd like your name badge to read a particular way, or to use a nickname, tell us that on the form. Tell us about any dietary restrictions we might need to know about.

(We are an IRS-recognized 501c3 nonprofit organization, so if you'd like to make an additional donation you can do that on this form, also.)

At the end, you'll be asked for payment information. You can use a credit card, a direct debit on your bank account, or even Google Pay. You'll see a

box labeled "Promo Code." Type the code **SAS50** into that box. When you enter that code, you'll see the 50 percent applied. If you do this on August 1 or later, the discount code will not work. This Early Bird rate is only good until the end of July, and it's only good for in-person attendance.

We'd love to see you in San Antonio, spending some time on the Riverwalk, enjoying some great food and fellowship, and working together to bring more trains to more people everywhere in America! [Register today with the code SAS50 and snag that 50 percent discount!](#)

RN:SAS Event Page

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**, split his time between budget-tracking in DC and addressing coalition partners and leaders in DC about our legislative strategy. He also did interviews with Streetsblog and with Bloomberg. Jim will be on vacation next week, but knows the professional staff will do a great job holding down the fort.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, spent the week [tracking budgetary action](#) in the House Appropriations Committee, while preparing for [next week's Senate markup](#). He also fielded a number of reporter inquiries on preparations for next year's World Cup, the Amtrak IG report on accessibility efforts at the railroad, and safety along the Brightline Florida corridor.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, is on vacation this week.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, followed this week's [House T&I hearing](#), staffed the Association's monthly board meeting, continued working on our internal planning for the [fall meeting](#) with our volunteers in Texas, responded to a number of emails and calls. He also worked on the usual comms outreach to our supporters.
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, is attending a conference in NYC this week.

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

User Name

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

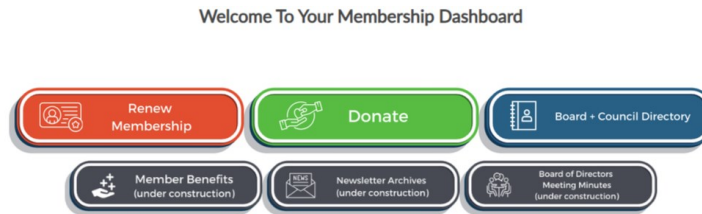
here to help and if necessary, work with CharityEngine to gain the answers. We are excited by the full complement of options and benefits that will be available to our supporters through one system.

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:



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!





## 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.

**WE HAVE A FULL SUMMER UPDATE,  
INCLUDING THE NEW *MARDI GRAS* SERVICE**

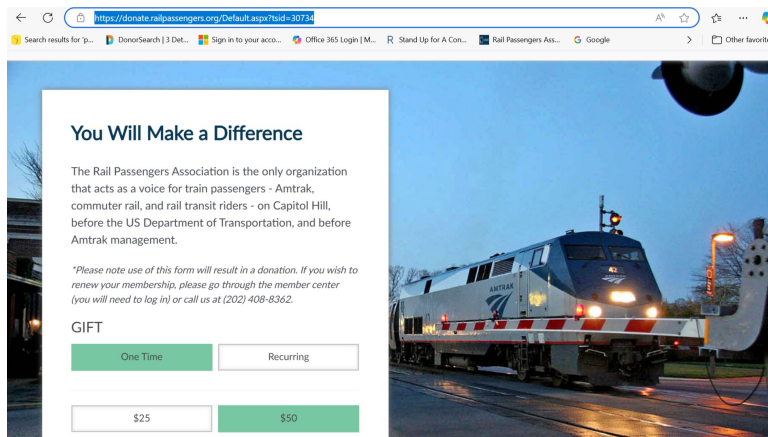
[CLICK HERE](#)

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>



LOOKING FOR SMARTER  
WAYS TO DONATE?



MAKING A CONTRIBUTION  
HAS NEVER BEEN EASIER!

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!

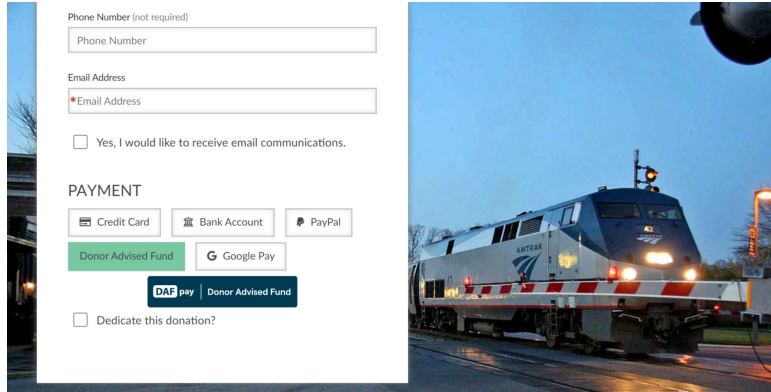
With multiple secure, protected methods of payment, you have more flexibility in the way dues are paid. Skip the hassle and [contact us](#) today for help setting up automatic or online payments.

- 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

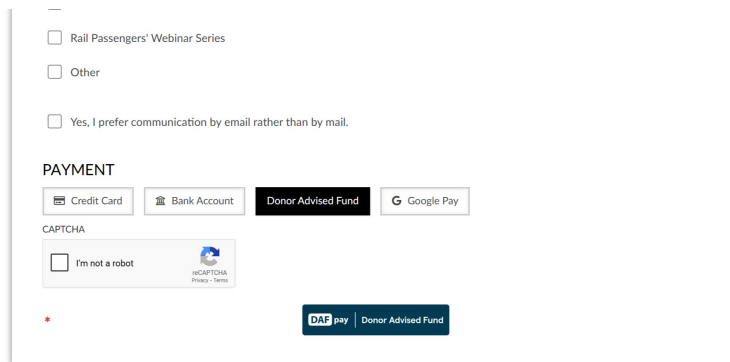
Credit Card  Bank Account  PayPal

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

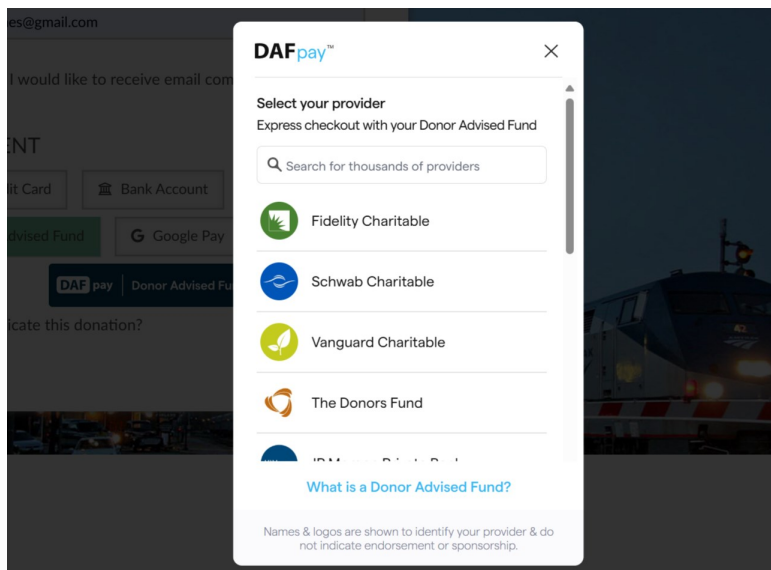
Credit Card  Bank Account  Donor Advised Fund  Google Pay

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

would like to receive email com

NT

Card  Bank Account

vised Fund  Google Pay

DAF pay Donor Advised Fund

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.

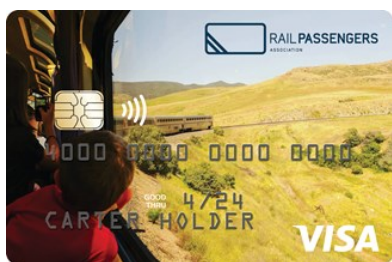
Select your provider, then follow their prompts. If you need to provide information on Rail Passengers Association, please use the below:

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](mailto:jstone@narprail.org)



## 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:**





# RAIL PASSENGERS

EST. 1967

Rail Passengers Association  
1200 G St. NW  
Suite 520  
Washington, DC 20005

P 202.408.8362  
F 202.408.8287

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