



Photo Credit: Ryan Ellis



FRIDAY HOTLINE

#1432

MARCH 13<sup>TH</sup>, 2026



## Association News

### Cali's HSR Reset: Scaled Down, Yes, But a Path Forward

*by Jim Mathews / President & CEO*

When the California High-Speed Rail Authority released its draft 2026 Business Plan recently, reactions across the rail community were immediate. Some praised it as a pragmatic strategy for reducing near term costs on the initial operating segment to keep the project alive. Others were disappointed that the new strategy envisions fewer trains, longer trip times, and lower overall capacity.

Both reactions are understandable.

The truth is that the new plan reflects a harder reality: a project that began with sweeping ambition is now adapting to a far more difficult political and financial environment. Whether that makes the glass half full or half empty depends largely on what you hoped California high-speed rail would become — and what you believe it still can be.

Anyone who has followed this project from the beginning can see that the vision laid out in the early years was bigger and more ambitious than what's now on the table. The new draft business plan leans heavily on staged delivery, revenue generation, and commercial partnerships in ways earlier plans did not. Some of that boldness from the original vision, a sweeping, transformative statewide system, has clearly been scaled back or deferred.

It's reasonable to feel disappointed about that. High-speed rail was never meant to be primarily a revenue-maximizing exercise. At its heart, it was meant to reshape how Californians move, linking communities, expanding access to jobs and housing, and providing a fast, clean alternative to congested highways and crowded airports.

But it's also important to acknowledge the reality in which this plan was written, and the on-the-ground situation that confronted CEO Ian Choudri — no stranger to leading large, complex mega-projects — when he replaced CEO Brian Kelly in the summer of 2024.

Over the past decade, California's high-speed rail program has had the rug pulled out from under it more than once, most recently last summer when the new Trump Administration yanked \$4 billion in appropriated money from the program. Federal support has swung wildly depending on who occupies the White House, supportive one year, hostile the next. For a capital-intensive project measured in decades, that kind of instability is devastating.

In our view the new business plan is, above all, an attempt to stabilize the program in the face of that uncertainty.

[READ MORE](#)

## Field Notes

### Passenger Train Service Resumes Between China and North Korea For First Time in Six

# Years

**By Philip Mayer, Volunteer Blogger**

A passenger rail line between the capital cities of Beijing, China, and Pyongyang, North Korea, opened on March 12, after a 6-year pandemic related hiatus. The journey takes almost 25 hours and will be offered in both directions on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays.

Tickets are currently restricted to passengers with business visas, typically diplomats, government officials, journalists, and entrepreneurs. North Korea has suspended almost all tourist visas since the Covid-19 pandemic began. Passenger train service between the two capital cities began in 1954 and has always been seen in both nations as a symbol of bilateral friendship. On the same day, a passenger rail line opened with daily service between Pyongyang and Dandong, a port city in northeastern China, directly on the border with North Korea.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jikun said "China and North Korea are friendly neighbors, and maintaining regular passenger train operations is of great significance for facilitating people-to-people exchanges between the two sides. China supports the relevant authorities of both countries in strengthening communication and creating more convenient conditions for bilateral travel."

The reopening of passenger train service between the two nations can be seen as an improvement in relations after China showed concern with recent increased military cooperation between North Korea and Russia. In September 2025, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un held talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing for the first time in six years and agreed to deepen economic cooperation and strategic communication.

There remains no train service between North and South Korea. In 2007, Koreans on both sides of the border had reason to be optimistic for bilateral reconciliation as a 10 mile cargo train rail line was opened for the first time since the peninsula was divided in 1953. This cargo rail line was short-lived however, as it closed in 2008. The chances of resumption in passenger or cargo rail service between North and South Korea seem very low as the North Korean government removed rail lines along the border in October 2024. This action, which included planting land mines, was justified by North Korea as a "self-defensive measure for inhibiting war."

The resumption of passenger rail service between China and North Korea will surely strengthen the cultural and economic ties between the two nations. Hopefully, the service will soon be available for tourist travel.

**Amtrak Pro-Tip:** If you have companion coupons, or Amtrak Guest Rewards 10 percent discount coupons, or something similar to use the next time you book a trip, for the time being you might be better off calling Amtrak Guest Rewards directly to apply the coupon and finish booking your trip. That's because the program rules say that you must apply coupons at the time of booking -- but lately both the Amtrak app and the Amtrak website are struggling with getting coupons applied to transactions. Sometimes it's not even offering the passenger an opportunity during the booking process to enter the coupon code. It's a known issue, and they're working on it, but the Call Center advised me this week that you'll always be able to use the coupons if you call them directly at 1-800-307-5000.

**Please email [Joe Aiello](mailto:joe@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.**

## 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](mailto:hotline@narprail.org) with the subject "HOTLINE PHOTO"

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## Hotline Links

*A curated selection of passenger rail and transportation stories from this week. Check out our social media feeds to read breaking news and join the conversation!*

[Nonprofit awards \\$340K to 8 cultural activations near public transit,](#)

## Hyde Park Herald

Funded through a MacArthur Foundation donation, Elevated Chicago is awarding eight "Elevating Culture Near Transit" grants for art projects and community events along the CTA's Green Line and other transit stops in Chicago's South and West sides.

### [California Zephyr, Southwest Chief suffer extraordinary mechanical delays over weekend](#), Trains

Passengers on two of Amtrak's western routes ran into multiple long equipment related delays en route late last week and into the weekend.

### [Healey-Driscoll Administration Awards \\$10 Million to Expand Microtransit and Last Mile Transit Connections Across Massachusetts](#), Mass.gov

The Bay State is awarding \$10M in grants to help close the last-mile gap to better connect people between already available public transit and their destination.

### [Amtrak's Largest Train Revamp in 55 Years Is Coming Soon](#), New York Times

(Gift Article) NYT travel reporter Gabe Castro-Root heads to Northern California to check in on the building of Amtrak's new Airo fleet.

### [Name The Train](#), Ride the Front Range

Guess Trainy McTrainface didn't make the final cut...

### [Gov. Mikie Sherrill takes ceremonial first train ride over new Portal North Bridge](#), CBS New York

With the first phase of the \$2.3B Portal North Bridge Project nearing an end - elected officials, Amtrak employees, and invited guests will take a celebratory trip over the new westbound tracks on Thursday afternoon.

### [VPRA, Amtrak launch new express bus service between Richmond and DC](#), WRIC ABC 8News

In order to help passengers navigate the service changes to the Long Bridge construction, Amtrak and VPRA launched a new shuttle bus service between Richmond and DC last weekend.

### [A push to reopen SEPTA's ticket office at Wilmington Train Station gains momentum](#), WDEL

Closed due to SEPTA's budget constraints late last year, the Delaware Transit Coalition are bringing their advocacy to elected officials in The First State to highlight the critical need for reopening the ticket office in Wilmington.

### [Race fans will again be able to ride the train to NASCAR races at Rockingham](#), The News & Observer

Being inspired by the popularity of the "Open Express" that took golf fans to and from the US Open at Pinehurst two years ago, NC By Train took a chance at another event train with last year's NASCAR at Rockingham Speedway. They are running it back!



**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

### Advocacy Workshops + Council Business Meeting





# WORKSHOPS

## + Days on the Hill

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

### [DC ADVOCACY WORKSHOPS REGISTRATION](#)

Registration is \$125.00

Due to the space limitations of our office, each of the sessions is **limited to 20 tickets** and there will be no on-site or virtual registration. Please attend the session for the state you reside in. **Registration ends at Midnight eastern on Friday, April 10th.**

The in-office workshops will run from 8:00a to 4:00p. Lunch will be provided (*attendees are responsible for their own breakfast*). Attendees will be responsible for securing their own lodging needs.

Stay tuned to [www.railpassengers.org/dc2026](http://www.railpassengers.org/dc2026) for more information.



## 2026 SPRING COUNCIL BUSINESS MEETING

**April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2026**  
Open Gov Hub  
1100 13th Street NW, Suite 800

### [2026 SPRING COUNCIL BUSINESS MEETING REGISTRATION](#)

In-person registration is \$99  
Virtual registration is free

The 2026 Spring Council Business Meeting will take place on Wednesday, April 22nd from 8:00a to 4:00p. Lunch will be provided (*attendees are responsible for their own breakfast*). Registration ends on Friday, April 10th at Midnight eastern. There will be no on-site registration.

Stay tuned to [www.railpassengers.org/2026SpringCouncilMeeting](http://www.railpassengers.org/2026SpringCouncilMeeting) for more information.

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## Local Meetings + Events

[Tour the Restored Michigan Central Station](#), Saturday, March 21, 10a

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!

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## Staff Updates

Your staff is at the table, in the field, having the conversations that make a difference for passengers across the country. Learn what they're up to each week and how you can support your Association's key missions!

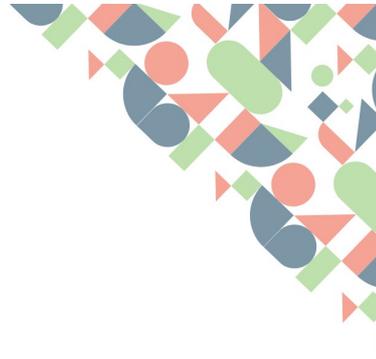
- **Jim Mathews, President & CEO**, met with coalition partners involved in responding to Union Pacific's plans to acquire Norfolk Southern, as well as preparing for a gathering of rail leaders in Germany.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, worked on developing language to address rising insurance premiums in the railroading industry, while also developing the calendar of briefings to prepare our members for Rail Passengers' annual Washington, D.C. advocacy summit.

- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, worked on fundraising messages and tended to the administrative and operational needs of the Association.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, was off this week following a sinus procedure on Monday
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, continues to work closely with our constituents on membership renewals, new memberships, troubleshooting access to the User Center, password resets, and adding additional **sub-memberships for those who qualify for that benefit**

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## Apply for Volunteer Staff at Rail Passengers Association

**VOLUNTEERS  
NEEDED**



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

Rail Passengers Association

[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE!](#)

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## 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](#)

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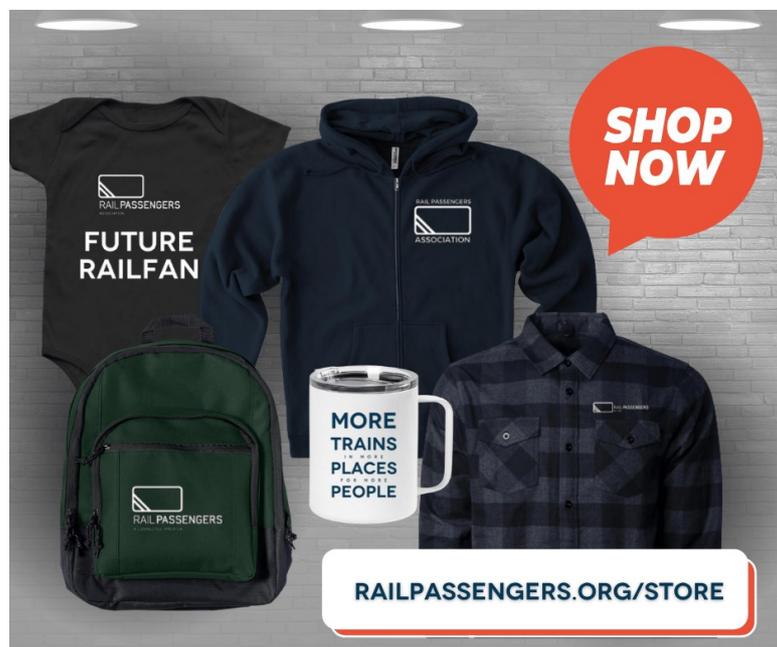
**NOTICE: Looking for your 2025 membership/donation tax documents?**

[Click here](#) for instructions.

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## 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



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

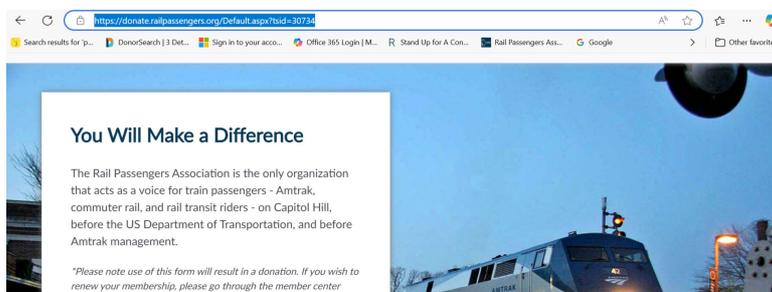
[CLICK HERE](http://railpassengers.org/timetables)

NOTE: Because we do update the links on our website - please bookmark **the main page** and not the individual schedules

## Donate Online with Confidence

You can donate to the Rail Passengers Association online with confidence, knowing your credit card information is secure. Charity Engine uses industry-standard SSL technology to keep your information secure. Don't wait for a paper appeal to donate, support the Association today by donating here. When the web browser shows a lock next to the URL, it means that it's an HTTPS, and it's secure:

<https://donate.railpassengers.org/Default.aspx?tsid=30734>





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

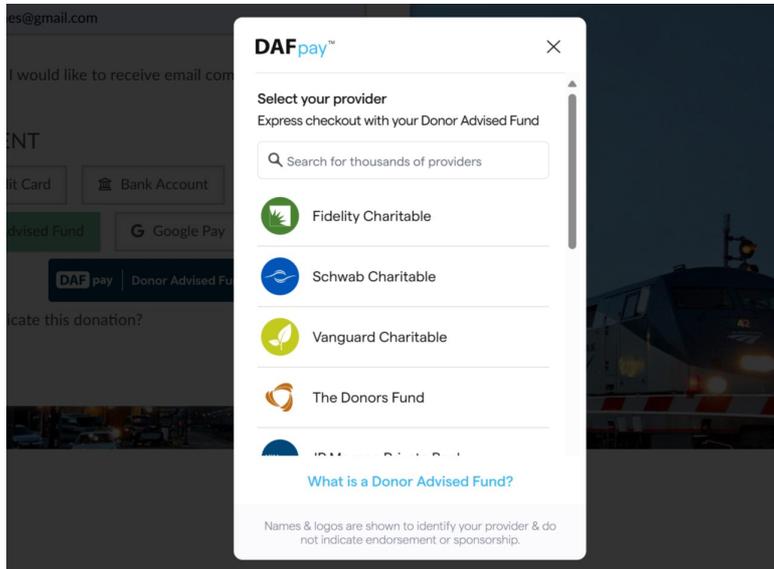
**Use Your Donor Advised Fund (DAF) to Donate, Renew or Join Online**

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:**

**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](mailto:jstone@narprail.org)  
Tax ID: 36-2615221

## Member & Donor Notices

- **The Rail Passengers Association is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. Our federal tax identification number is 36-2615221**
- **To help facilitate dissemination of electronic thank you receipts, please make sure your contact information, specifically your email address, is up-to-date in your Neon profile.**
- **If you need assistance with your membership, please call the Office at 202-408-8362.**
- **While our staff continues to work remotely, we are unable to provide permanent membership cards.** You can print a temporary membership card by creating an account at [www.railpassengers.org](http://www.railpassengers.org) (select "My Account" on the homepage).
- **Complete all information!** -- Before sealing your envelope, PLEASE double-check the credit card information on the buck slip!
  - Print credit card information clearly.
  - **Include an expiration date, month and year, as well as the CVV number.**
  - Without **COMPLETE** information, your membership renewal or donation can't be processed.
- **If you have your financial institution send a check on your behalf, without a buckslip, PLEASE instruct them to add:**
  - a notation in the memo field if the payment is for membership dues or a donation, AND,
  - your Rail Passengers Association member ID. If we have multiple members with the same name, i.e., John Smith, it can be hard to identify the correct member to attribute the payment, without the member ID.



Rail Passengers Association members have access to a full

Charity  
Navigator



★ FOUR-STAR ★

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](#).

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## THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS:



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**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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