



Photo credit: Betty White



FRIDAY HOTLINE

#1407

AUGUST 22ND, 2025



NOTE: Our office has been getting a number of questions as of late about our printed "Passengers Voice" newsletter. We, unfortunately, stopped production in the Spring of 2020 and, as of this notice, do not have plans to start up again.

Association News

SEPTA Cuts to Begin This Sunday

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

With the failure of the Pennsylvania Legislature to find a solution for the fiscal cliff facing the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA), people across the greater Philadelphia area are bracing for a disastrous reduction in service that will go into effect starting Sunday.

Faced with a \$213 million budget deficit, SEPTA announced earlier this summer that it will be forced to [cut 20% of service starting in August](#), increasing to a 45% reduction in service on January 1, 2026. Those cuts will be paired with a 21.5% fare increase beginning September 1.

Will Amtrak Service be Affected?

The brief answer is: neither Amtrak's *Keystone* nor *Pennsylvanian* service are in danger of ceasing operations. However, if the funding crisis is not addressed, it will lead to deterioration of the infrastructure on which Amtrak trains operate.

There was some confusion surrounding this question, sparked by comments from Congressman Brendan Boyle (D-PA) made during [a call with the press earlier this week](#).

"Many people in our area rely on the *Keystone Service*," said Congressman Boyle. "If SEPTA cuts or eliminates that funding to Amtrak, that rail line will cease to operate."

However, in a briefing with reporters, Gov. Josh Shapiro (D) clarified that the State-Supported Amtrak service will not be going away—though it will be negatively affected.

"If SEPTA is unable to make the payments that they need to make to Amtrak, what it could potentially do is slow down the maintenance that is needed along those lines, which could cause slowdowns along those routes or having more of those routes have to get stopped because of a maintenance issue," said Gov. Shapiro. "But, the lines aren't going to be cancelled. They are going to be compromised if we don't get this funding in place."

Amtrak hasn't addressed the confusion directly, providing a general statement about how it would stall infrastructure upgrades [in response to an inquiry by News abc27](#):

"SEPTA operates a critical commuter service for the Greater Philadelphia Region that complements Amtrak intercity service.

"While failure to adequately fund SEPTA's operation would directly impact

SEPTA-operated commuter trains that run along Amtrak infrastructure, the potential reduction in SEPTA's financial contribution will have a negative impact on Amtrak's ability to reinvest in the rail network. This could lead to a deterioration in infrastructure condition and authorized train operating speeds, negatively impacting Amtrak-operated, PennDOT-sponsored Keystone Service and Pennsylvanian service between Philadelphia, Harrisburg, and Pittsburgh, as well as Northeast Corridor services.

"SEPTA and PennDOT are good partners, helping to advance the current and future operation of intercity and commuter passenger rail service in the region and nation. We hope there is a path forward so SEPTA can continue providing vital transportation service and partnerships to the region."

Leaders Warn of Social and Economic Impacts

What is certain is that the cuts to SEPTA will be a disaster for mobility and economic activity in the sixth largest city in the US—and not just for passengers. Regional leaders are already warning motorists to plan on longer commutes as transit users flood roadways, and to avoid the city center during peak hours.

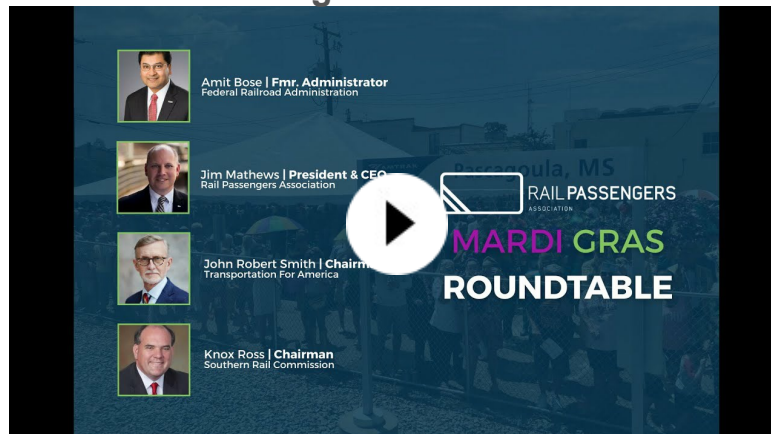
The cuts will be an even heavier burden for people without access to cars, including school-aged children. Of the 198,000 students in the School District of Philadelphia, [roughly 52,000 depend on SEPTA](#) to get to and from school.

Transportation officials are also [sounding the alarm for major events](#), such as the Philadelphia Eagles' home opener on September 4. SEPTA normally operates 10 extra trains to move roughly 17,000 fans in and out of the area; that number will now drop to four.

City leaders are also concerned about the logistics for next summer's World Cup, where half a million visitors are projected to travel from across the globe to attend six matches at Lincoln Financial Field.

It's not too late to head off this catastrophe. Rail Passengers is [asking Pennsylvania passengers to ask the State Legislature to fund this vital transportation system!](#)

"Luck Had Nothing To Do With It"



A cafe car conversation that rivals any actor's studio or chef's table special.

Rail Passengers President & CEO Jim Mathews is joined by Fmr. Federal Railroad Administration Administrator Amit Bose, Southern Rail Commission Chairman Knox Ross, and Transportation for America Chairman John Robert Smith onboard the celebratory launch of Amtrak's *Mardi Gras* service along the Gulf Coast.

For more videos from the Mardi Gras launch, check out our [YouTube channel](#).

'Mardi Gras' Is Exactly Right

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

What's in a name?

"Mardi Gras" is an identity, a philosophy, a way of celebrating a local culture that unites the entire U.S. Gulf Coast. And now, it's also a train that unites the Gulf Coast.

I was thrilled to be on the inaugural run of Amtrak's new Mardi Gras service between New Orleans and Mobile on Saturday. It's the culmination of two decades of effort by quite literally hundreds of people – advocates, community leaders, elected officials, ourselves at Rail Passengers and our allies, all supporting the leadership of the Southern Rail Commission over the years to push through all the obstacles.

My very first work trip as your President & CEO – one month after I started – was to jump-start our Association's efforts to support restoration of this service, criss-crossing counties in Mississippi and Alabama to press local officials about the importance of getting trains moving again through the region. And I rode a promotional "inspection train" in 2016 that was a kind of preview of my experience yesterday, rolling into each station to thunderous crowds, raucous second line bands, and communities putting on their Fat Tuesday Best to out-do one another in welcoming us, their train, to their town.



When the "Mardi Gras" name first leaked, a lot of the railfan community howled. Some thought it was silly, others thought it sent the "wrong message." But replaying that 2016 inspection train experience yesterday, following the second line on to the train in New Orleans, shaking hands and sipping the champagne handed out by the locals in Bay St. Louis, Miss., talking with giddy revelers dressed in ever-more-outrageous costumes, and hearing all of them talk about what they planned to do on their own "first trips," it was abundantly clear: "Mardi Gras," the name, was a stroke of marketing genius.

As a visible symbol of [what this simple twice daily service will do for the served communities](#), it's pitch-perfect. It captures exactly why this train will succeed. It was shared effort across Gulf Coast communities, to bring about a shared vision, to connect their shared culture. After riding the train both ways yesterday, I have no worries at all about whether the train will attract riders. It's sold out for the next few weeks, and if you want the \$15 fares you'll have to book in advance.

The demand is strong, the joy is palpable, and the excitement is clear. These communities all fought for their train, and now they're going to ride their train, and celebrate their shared culture. The name is perfect. Mardi Gras is more than a day or even a festival. It's a way of life for those who tend to its legacy, and now they'll have a train to celebrate as well.

15 Great Reasons to Welcome the New Acelas

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

I have upwards of 250,000 miles on passenger trains from around the world. I've ridden every Amtrak train in the system except the Auto Train (an oversight I need to fix), plus the Ave, the TGV, Shinkansen, lumbering-but-lovable Brit Rail, Dutch trains, French trains, Austrian trains, Italian trains, the simultaneously stunning and practical [Alaska Railroad](#), and on, and on. But in my previous job before coming to the Association, I used the Acela for business trips between D.C. and New York City as often as three times per week. For years. **My personal nerdy mileage log says I have 97,320 miles on the Acela service alone.** In fact, while I was Executive Editor for digital editorial at Aviation Week, I was also a member of the Amtrak Customer Advisory Committee, where my job was to represent the Acela riders, specifically.

So, believe me when I say that over the years I developed a love-hate relationship with the existing Acela equipment. It was state of the art...once. But there were things about it that went from being a mere inconvenience to an outright irritation after more than a few trips. That's why I'm so excited that next week I get to take my long-awaited first trip on [Amtrak's newest trainset for the Acela service](#) between DC and Boston – [the Alstom Avelia Liberty](#).

I took part in some design previews, and even walked through a brand-new, plastic-bag-wrapped train [at Alstom's Hornell, N.Y., assembly plant](#) for these trains. But nothing will beat getting the chance to really ride the train, in actual service. I'll post pictures and videos and bits of the experience next week when I take the ride. Until then, I just wanted to share with everyone

my personal list of 15 reasons why I'm so excited for the introduction of these new trains:

[<<CLICK HERE TO READ JIM'S 15 REASONS>>](#)

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@narprrail.org with the subject "HOTLINE PHOTO"

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

Hotline Links

A curated selection of passenger rail and transportation stories from this week. Check out our social media feeds on [Twitter](#) & [Facebook](#) to read breaking news and join the conversation!

[NextGen Acela, Amtrak](#)

You can now get your tickets for the new Acela trains. Just look for the "NextGen" label when booking.

[Local opinion: Advocating for trains in the desert, Tucson.com](#)

In an op-ed published by Tucson.com, UofA urban planning student Myla Lutes-Clark explores the role that public transportation can play along the I-10 corridor in Arizona and what it could mean for the "elephant in the room" - the climate crisis.

[Chicago's Metra Opens Updated Station, Dedicates New Bridge Over Milwaukee Ave, Metro Magazine](#)

Thanks to a mixture of FRA/FTA grants and funding from both Metra and CP, the \$39.5M infrastructure project enhances safety, accessibility, and service reliability on the Milwaukee District North Line.

[MBTA improving Foxboro station ahead of World Cup, WPRI.com](#)

Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) is launching a major upgrade to the Foxboro commuter rail station, which will serve thousands of fans attending seven matches at Gillette Stadium.

[Transit Briefs: WMATA, TriMet, Denver RTD, Railway Age](#)

Railway Age's transit news, including a public vote on DC Metro's new train design and TriMet's (Portland, OR) real-time displays.

[TRAX service to return to the University of Utah after 3-month project, Deseret News](#)

After a three-month infrastructure upgrade, Utah Transit Authority's TRAX Red Line will resume service to the University of Utah this Sunday, just in time for the start of the fall semester.

[How SEPTA cuts may impact Bucks County bus, rail service this summer, Philly Burbs](#)

A more localized look at the current SEPTA situation in Philly. Unless an 11th hour hail mary comes to light, Bus Routes 127 and 128 and several Trenton Line stops - including Levittown, Bristol, and Croydon - will be discontinued in Bucks County, PA.



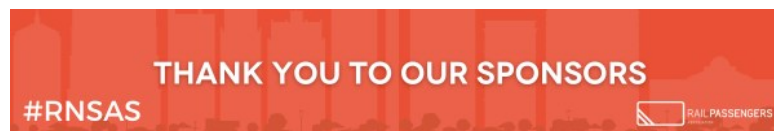
If you aren't following Rail Passengers on social media, you should be!

Upcoming Events

RailNation: San Antonio



[Click Here for the RN:SAS Event Page](#)



Individual Sponsors:

Bruce Ashton
Tom & Christy Compson
Gary Moline
J.R. Price
Michael Robinson
Miles Schulze

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**, enjoyed some great bookends this week. Last weekend, he got to take part in the launch of Amtrak's Mardi Gras service on the first train between New Orleans and Mobile, and capped this week with a "field trip" to Metra's operations center in Chicago and a full day on the Iowa Interstate Railroad to learn first-hand about the complexities – and successes – in running passenger and freight trains in the same congested space. In between, he took part in informal meetings with Amtrak leaders, Federal Railroad Administration

- officials, and the Surface Transportation Board.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, took advantage of the August recess to work with Congressional offices on several policy proposals for the Surface Transportation Reauthorization.
 - **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, processed membership dues and donations mailed to the DC office, began the process of closing July financials, and tended to the administrative/operational needs of the Association. She also joined Kimberly in meetings with CharityEngine to discuss system enhancements.
 - **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, joined Jim on an inspection tour hosted by the Iowa Interstate Railroad from Chicago to Moline. First, getting the lay of the land from officials at Metra, then seeing the potential passenger rail route out towards the Quad Cities. Joe also continued his work on fall meeting planning and editing videos from this week's successful launch of Amtrak's Mardi Gras service.
 - **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, continues to work closely with our members to assist with our new system. She and Jonsie are actively collaborating with CharityEngine to identify areas where members experience difficulty and to streamline processes to make the system more user-friendly. While members at qualifying levels do not yet have the ability to add sub-members directly through their accounts, Kimberly is happy to assist - simply email her with the name and email address of the individual you'd like linked to your membership/household.

Keep Your Contact Info & Preferences Up to Date

We want to be sure you never miss important updates, membership news, or your transaction receipts! You can easily update your email address, phone number, mailing address, and communication preferences anytime through the CharityEngine Constituent Portal:

<https://membership.railpassengers.org/usercenter> (we recommend bookmarking this link for easy access)

Getting Started

1. Visit the Login page and enter the User Name and Password associated with your CharityEngine account.

Log in

2. Once you're logged in, you'll see your account dashboard. Click "Update Your Info."

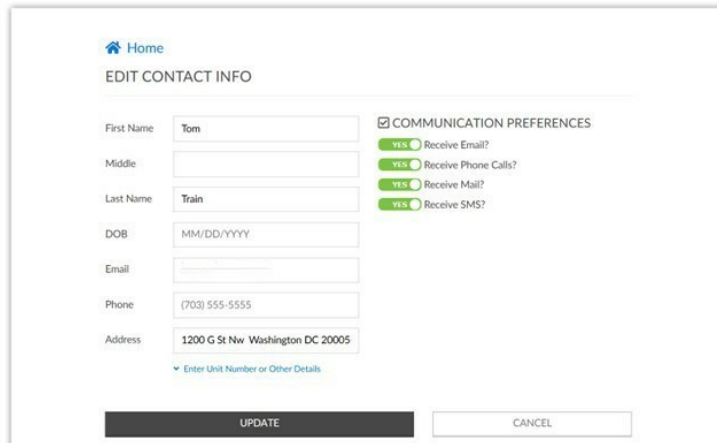
Making Updates

On the Edit Contact Info screen, you can:

Update your personal details like email, phone, and address.

Adjust your communication preferences—switch the green “Yes” button to red “No” (or vice versa)

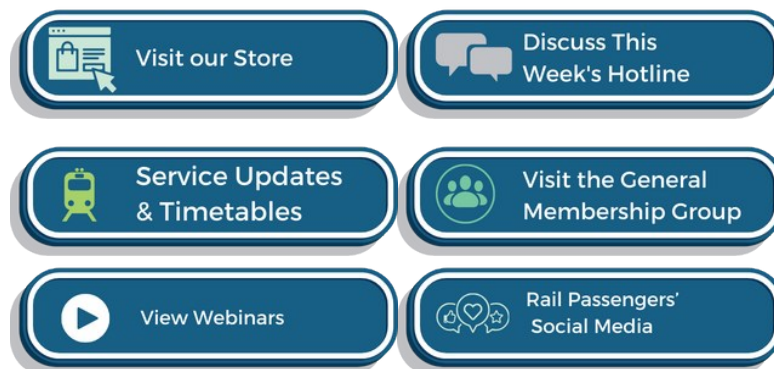
Click **UPDATE** to save your changes.



A Quick Tip

Since transaction receipts are sent by email, having your current email address on file will ensure you receive everything without delay.

We Have Merch!



Rail Passengers Timetables

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

**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>

You Will Make a Difference

The Rail Passengers Association is the only organization that acts as a voice for train passengers - Amtrak, commuter rail, and rail transit riders - on Capitol Hill, before the US Department of Transportation, and before Amtrak management.

**Please note use of this form will result in a donation. If you wish to renew your membership, please go through the member center (you will need to log in) or call us at (202) 408-8362.*

GIFT



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

Dedicate this donation?

Membership Form:

Rail Passengers' Webinar Series

Other

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

PAYMENT

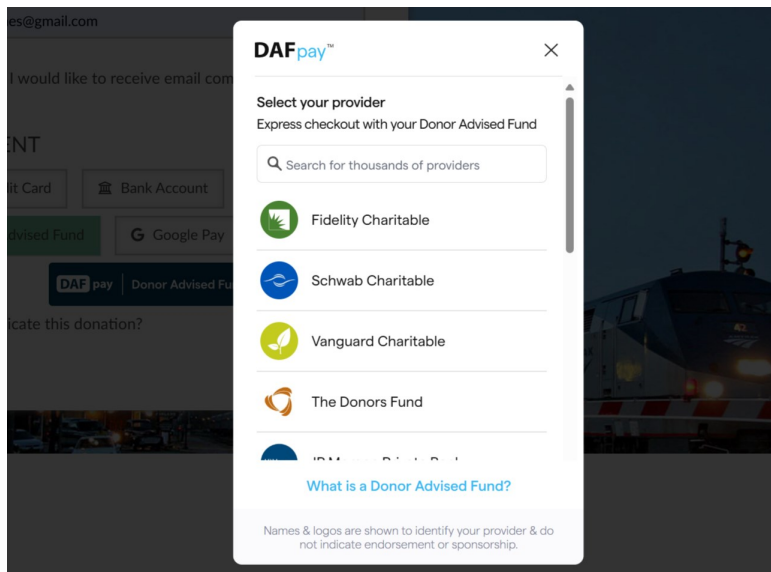
Credit Card Bank Account Donor Advised Fund Google Pay

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.



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 backslip, PLEASE instruct them to add:
 - a notation in the memo field if the payment is for membership dues or a donation, AND,
 - your Rail Passengers Association member ID. If we have multiple members with the same name, i.e., John Smith, it can be hard to identify the correct member to attribute the payment, without the member ID.



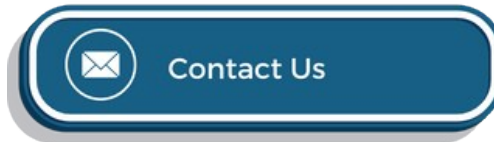
Rail Passengers Association members have access to a full service, nationwide federal credit union with extensive product and service offerings. Signature FCU is the exclusive provider of the [Rail Passengers Association-branded Visa credit card](#) with our logo, which supports our work by giving back to our organization, and gives you 1 point for every \$1 you spend to redeem for travel and merchandise. The card has no annual fee, no balance transfer fees, no foreign transaction fees, and has a very low interest rate.



Rail Passengers Association Earns Coveted 4-Star Rating from Charity Navigator

Rail Passengers Association's strong financial health and commitment to accountability and transparency have earned it a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator, America's largest independent charity evaluator. Our Charity Navigator profile can be found by clicking [here](#).

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



THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS:



RAIL PASSENGERS

EST. 1967

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