



Photo credit: James Tart



THURSDAY HOTLINE

#1408

AUGUST 28TH, 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



"Without labor, nothing prospers." - Sophocles

Our office will be closing at Noon Eastern on Friday, August 29th and will be closed on Monday, September 1st for the Labor Day weekend.

## Celebrating the Next Generation





## [Guest Blog] Acelabration! Let's Talk Seats

*By T.J. Girsch, Former Vice Chair*

Yesterday, I was fortunate enough to be invited to ride along for a short segment of yesterday's sneak preview run of Amtrak's new NextGen Acela trainset. I was thrilled and jumped at the chance, and I've got quite a few thoughts based on my quick Providence-to-Boston jaunt. But based on the early social media commentary (by people who, as far as I can tell, have not yet actually been aboard), one thing stands out: concerns about the seats. Commenters have been posting that the seats "look terrible" or, more crudely, "suck."

Having actually *ridden* the train, I thought I'd weigh in here. Spoiler alert! They do not "suck." In fact, I thought they were great, even though I was only in them for a short time. Jim Mathews rode the entire length of the route, so I'm sure he can give you more detail, but the bottom line is that if you were happy with the seats on the first-gen Acela, you're almost certainly going to be happy with these.



I get the concern. The "Venture" trainsets that run corridor services out of Chicago have *terrible* seats, so anyone who's ridden those would rightly be worried. But those seats were an IDOT decision, not an Amtrak one. Amtrak, in my opinion, got this one right. Given the heavy use of Acela by NYC business types and DC politicians and power brokers, they'd have been foolish not to.

[\[BUT HOW ABOUT THE PITCH? CLICK HERE TO FIND OUT\]](#)

## USDOT Unveils Initiatives for America's Busiest Trains Stations

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

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) used this week's launch of Amtrak's NextGen Acelas to announce that the federal government will be playing a bigger role in shaping the development and operations of some of the busiest intercity train stations in the U.S.

### Washington Union Station

The "whistle stop" tour started at Washington, DC, where Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy [announced that his department would be playing a greater role in managing Washington Union Station](#), reclaiming direct control of the historic building. USDOT has owned Washington Union Station since the early 1980s when Congress passed the Union Station Redevelopment

Act of 1981, with the USDOT delegating control to the Union Station Redevelopment Corporation (USRC), established in 1983. In 2025, Amtrak took over management and operations [through a sublease secured after a lengthy legal battle](#).

The details of the announcement were light, with the USDOT indicating formal action confirming the USDOT's renewed control of Washington Union Station will come sometime in September.

"Under President Trump and Secretary Duffy's leadership, USDOT will now leverage the valuable commercial aspects of Union Station, under the direct management of USRC, to reinvest in Union Station," stated the announcement. "The capital needs of Union Station include improvements to elevators, lighting, and security along with enhancements to the passenger experience and replacing the roof and other major systems."

### **New York Penn Station**

Secretary Duffy deboarded the NextGen Acelas in New York City, where he was joined by Special Advisor to the Amtrak Board Andy Byford to [announce a revised implementation schedule for the Penn Station "Transformation" project](#). The Trump Administration announced the takeover of the megaproject from the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) in April of this year.

The USDOT announced it will initiate an "approximately 18-month Service Optimization Study in October with a goal of studying ways to accommodate passenger service growth at New York Penn Station and the surrounding region", while setting an ambitious goal for initiating construction by 2027.

Other elements of the timeline outlined by the USDOT include:

**August 2025:** Master developer solicitation advance notice

**Fall 2025:** Contracting industry stakeholder engagement

**Late 2025:** Master developer solicitation release

**May 2026:** Master developer selection

**Summer 2026 to End of 2027:** Preliminary design and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) activities

**End of 2027:** Construction initiation

Byford, known for his transit leadership in New York and London, will oversee the redevelopment, focusing on increasing train capacity and improving the passenger experience.

While the final design remains undecided—and officials wouldn't say whether or not Madison Square Garden would need to be relocated—Byford indicated they would not seek to advance proposals that would require the demolition of a block south of 31st Street; Amtrak, the MTA, and NJ Transit [had previously stated this would be necessary](#).

Intriguingly, Amtrak's Byford seems to be interested in pursuing through-running, which would allow for the conservation of valuable track space at Penn Station through the optimization of commuter railroad operations.

"While we look to see what more capacity can we squeeze out of the existing station, both through more efficient operations, literally the logistics of running the trains through the station, plus with the potential for through-running," said Byford.

While many of the critical details will be decided in the coming months, the announcement received praise from New York Governor Kathy Hochul.

"Those conversations successfully secured federal funding in April to advance redevelopment, allowing us to reallocate over \$1 billion for other critical projects," [Gov. Hochul said in a statement](#). "With Secretary Duffy now advancing this project and requesting design proposals, New Yorkers are one step closer to a station worthy of this great city."

## **Statement on Trump Firing of STB Board Member**

Rail Passengers Association President & CEO Jim Mathews issued the following statement regarding the Trump Administration's firing of Robert Primus, a member of the Surface Transportation Board, the independent federal agency tasked with providing regulatory oversight of America's railroads:

*"I am deeply troubled by the White House's decision last night to remove Robert E. Primus from the Surface Transportation Board (STB) on the grounds that 'his views do not align with President Trump's America First agenda.' That violates the law. Under the Interstate Commerce Commission Termination Act of 1995—the law that established the STB—Board members can only be removed for cause: specifically, inefficiency, neglect of duty, or malfeasance in office.*

*"This action raises serious questions about political interference in what is meant to be an independent regulatory agency. STB members are Senateconfirmed and serve fixed terms precisely to ensure they can base*

*their decisions on the public interest, free from partisan preference. Removing Mr. Primus for policy disagreement undermines that independence and sets a dangerous precedent—not only for the integrity of the STB's deliberations, but also for the broader system of regulatory independence established by Congress.*

*"This move will hinder the Board's ability to carry out its duties in a dispassionate and apolitical fashion—a task made all the more critical given [the proposed mega-merger between Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern](#)."*

Primus is serving his second term to the Board. He was initially nominated by President Donald Trump during President Trump's first term and unanimously confirmed by a Republican-controlled U.S. Senate. Primus was then renominated by President Joe Biden, and he was again unanimously confirmed, this time by a Democrat-controlled Senate.

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## 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.

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## Hotline Links

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

### [SEPTA cuts have begun. What do you need to know about the changes?, WHY?](#)

A new, unfortunate, reality has officially hit SEPTA riders and it is only the beginning.

### [Railroad companies fail to join safety program after toxic East Palestine derailment, Ideastream Public Media](#)

Two and a half years after the devastating East Palestine derailment in Ohio, the Class 1 railroads have yet to fully commit to the federal Confidential Close Call Reporting System (C3RS) - a proven safety initiative modeled after aviation's success.

Rail Passengers Association President & CEO Jim Mathews, who served on the now-disbanded federal working group, voiced his concern: *"We had an opportunity as a group to make things better and make things safer, and we didn't do it. Think about how much better and how much safer it could be if we could add all of those 120,000 employees into the mix..."*

### [CTA gets \\$74M from Metra, Pace to delay 40% service cuts next year, Chicago Sun-Times](#)

The CTA has received a temporary lifeline - \$74M from Metra, Pace, and the RTA - to delay 40% service cuts. The measure buys a few months for lawmakers to pass a long-term solution and address the looming \$700M budget deficit.

### [REVIEW: Fairhope woman takes 1st Amtrak Mardi Gras Line to New Orleans, Gulf Coast Media](#)

Public reaction to last week's launch of Mardi Gras service in the Gulf Coast is starting to roll in.

### [Texas panel OKs \\$3.5M to keep Amtrak Heartland Flyer rolling, Progressive Railroading](#)

ICYMI: The Texas Transportation Commission gave the green light for the Regional Transportation Council's Heartland Flyer funding stopgap.

[Boise, Idaho, takes step toward developing commuter rail service, Trains Pro](#)

Based on an ongoing study over the last 18 months, the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho (COMPASS) has picked commuter rail as their public transit mode of choice between Caldwell and Boise - while an advocacy group in Alaska is calling for a pilot program aimed at getting cars off the road.

[Would a new Browns stadium come with a new RTA rail station?, Cleveland.com](#)

A new football stadium as transit orientated development? Could be happening in Cleveland.



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

[2025 BSPRA Annual Conference](#), September 8-10

[RailNation: San Antonio](#), October 3-5

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!

## RailNation: San Antonio



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

## THANK YOU TO OUR EVENT SPONSORS

### CORPORATE/GROUPS



### INDIVIDUALS

BRUCE ASHTON  
TOM & CHRISTY COMPTON

## 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**, attended pre-launch events this week for Amtrak's new Next-Generation Acela service on the Northeast Corridor, capped with a trip on Wednesday from DC to Boston to experience the new trainsets along with Amtrak leadership, appointed officials, and journalists picked up along the way. He also used this opportunity for informal meetings with leaders on the train, as well as giving several press interviews.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, was on vacation for the first half of the week, and helped analyze and formulate a response to rail-focused actions taken by the U.S. Department of Transportation and the Trump Administration.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, continued working with our Accounting partner to close July financials, met with CharityEngine to review system enhancements, and tended to the Association's administrative/operational needs.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, tracked coverage of last week's Mardi Gras launch and this week's celebratory NextGen Acela event. Edited Jim's videos from the road and communicated with members & supporters through social media, email, and calls. Joe also continued planning for our fall meeting in San Antonio.
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, would like to share a quick tip for anyone having difficulty logging into the User Center. The best practice is to click "Forgot Password" at the login screen. This will automatically send a reset password link to the email address you originally used to create your account - which also serves as your default username.

*An issue with our 90/60/30-day membership renewal reminder system was discovered, and in the process of turning it on, the reminder email was inadvertently sent to a wider audience than intended. If you received one of these messages, and you are not due for renewal, please feel free to disregard it. We are working with our developers to ensure this is corrected.*

## 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

@

🔒

Remember me
 [Forgot password?](#)

LOG IN

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



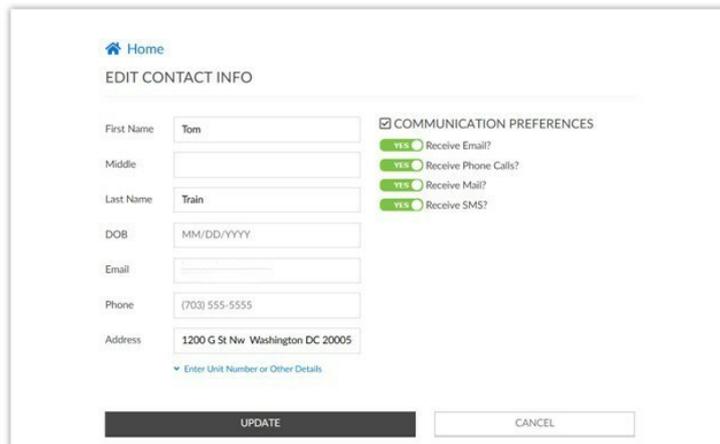
### Making Updates

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](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

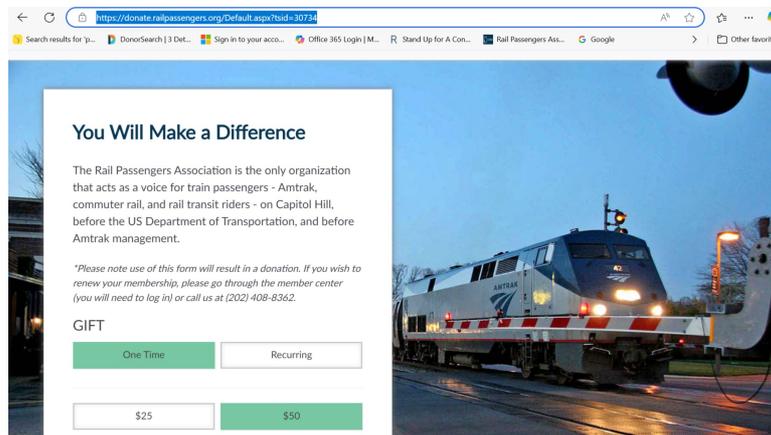
CLICK HERE

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!

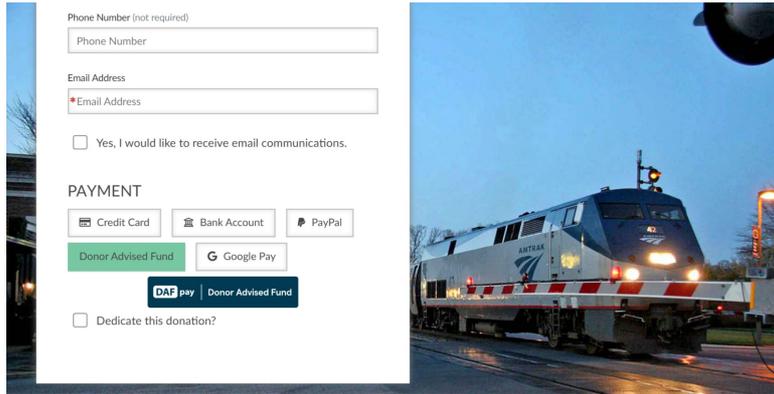
With multiple secure, protected methods of payment, you have more flexibility in the way dues are paid. Skip the hassle and [contact us](#) today for help setting up automatic or online payments.

- 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

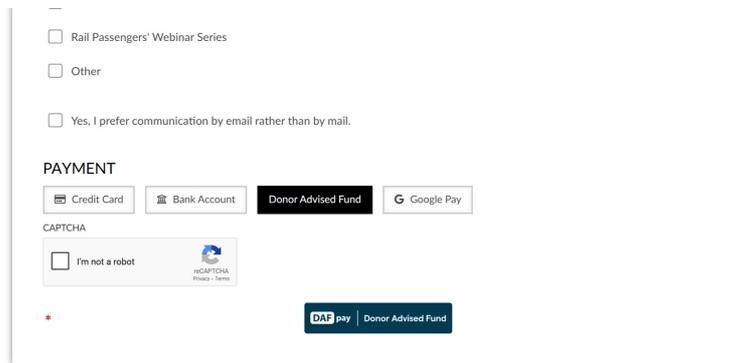
## Use Your Donor Advised Fund (DAF) to Donate, Renew or Join Online

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.

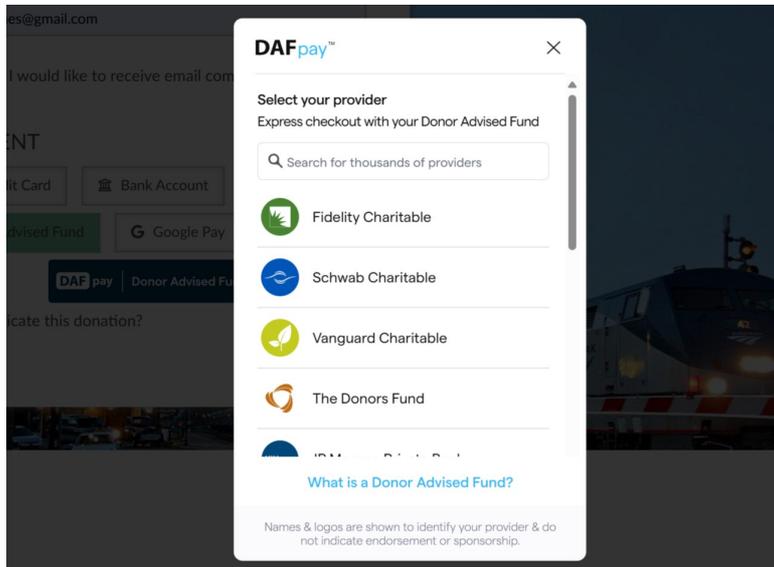
### Donation Form:



### 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 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

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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)

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