



Photo credit: Jeff Pletcher

RAIL PASSENGERS
ASSOCIATION

FRIDAY HOTLINE

#1409

SEPTEMBER 5TH, 2025



Take Action

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

Could Atlanta Be the Next Denver?

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

Efforts at developing, and funding, a new Amtrak station somewhere in downtown Atlanta may be picking up steam, as the [Atlanta Regional Commission](#) kicks off a study aimed at identifying a site by the end of the year.

Planners and boosters are pointing to the Denver Union Station experience as an example of how the new train station could help transform Atlanta's downtown, a vision Mayor Andrew Dickens has already started to make into reality with the [\\$5 billion Centennial Yards project](#).

Tejas Kotak, a senior planner at the ARC, was quoted in an [Atlanta Journal-Constitution article](#) as saying that CSX and Norfolk Southern have "expressed openness" toward a downtown location, and as a result ARC is looking at the potential for building either a spur line or new tracks along the existing rights-of-way.

I can confirm from my informal regular conversations with both of those railroads that if Amtrak, the city, and others can come to the table with capital investment and a willingness to work through the complexities of dispatching and scheduling, they would likely find the railroads ready to talk in more detail.

ARC is looking at sites right now that are very close to nine separate MARTA subway stops as well as a Greyhound bus station. That's a huge improvement over today's Amtrak station which is small, nearly impossible for those with disabilities, and in need of real TLC. The newspaper also notes that the closest MARTA station to Amtrak right now is more than a mile away, "and even further from downtown."

In this year's legislative report and [annual grant request to Congress](#), Amtrak argued that "properly located and paired with congestion-relieving infrastructure improvements, a new station could also enable Atlanta to become a hub for intercity passenger trains connecting both major cities and small communities across the Southeast."

And in the Federal Railroad Administration's [Long-Distance Rail Study completed last year](#), FRA and the study partners envisioned Atlanta as one of four potential new hubs for intercity passenger rail in this country. While today's *Crescent* service through Atlanta creates 32 direct and 370 indirect connections all by itself, the FRA study would add three more routes through Atlanta, which would add 71 more direct connections and 122 indirect.

Kotak told the newspaper that [Denver Union Station](#) is a model, a station

that serves as a gathering spot – and an economic boon – even for people who aren't traveling by train.

[\[LEARN MORE ABOUT THE DENVER COMPARISONS HERE\]](#)

California Outlines Alternatives for Initial Operating System

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

The California High-Speed Rail Authority (CAHSRA) issued [a 2025 Supplemental Project Update Report](#) late last month, outlining new alternatives for the configuration of the system's Initial Operating Segment (IOS). The CAHSRA argues that by reconfiguring the IOS to connect to more heavily populated areas, they can increase ridership and revenue for the system launch, setting future expansions on a firmer footing.

The report presented three phased scenarios for phased delivery:

Merced–Bakersfield Segment

- A 171-mile stretch currently under active construction in the Central Valley.
- Designed to serve as the backbone of the system, with nearly 70 miles of guideway and 55 structures already completed.
- Prioritization required by statute.

San Francisco–Gilroy–Bakersfield Segment

- Would extend service from San Francisco through Gilroy to Bakersfield.
- Includes upgrades to the Gilroy–San Jose corridor to integrate with Caltrain's electrified network.

Gilroy–Palmdale Segment

- Adds a southern extension through Palmdale
- Connects with Metrolink, and could utilize the High-Desert Corridor to connect to Brightline West in Victor Valley.

CAHSRA is statutorily obligated to prioritize delivery of the Merced – Bakersfield segment, and the document states that the authority plans to do so unless otherwise directed by the Legislature.

However, CAHSRA argues that financial realities faced by the system require it to look at ways to optimize its initial service footprint and recommends that the state prioritize introduction of service to areas with greater population, ridership, and revenue potential. It also argues that a successful service launch will create greater opportunities for engaging with the private sector through a Public-Private Partnerships (P3) delivery model.

Local leaders in Merced have responded to the news with disappointment, saying they weren't notified in advance of the report's publication.

"We felt blindsided on Friday, Aug. 22 when the project update was released suggesting Merced be resequenced," [Deputy City Manager Frank Quintero told reporters](#). "We are grateful for the optimism high-speed rail has brought to the community, but that brilliance is now tarnished."

CAHSRA officials insisted that Merced will be part of the system, whichever sequencing the state legislature decides to support.

"There is no question that (the) connection of Merced is important because at some point (the high-speed service will connect) to Sacramento, too," said CAHSRA Board Member Henry Perea. So, I think everything is on the table and it's just giving the options to the state Legislature to make a decision on which one they see as a priority."

Funding Remains an Issue

A central theme of the report is the need for stable, long-term funding. While the report factors in a proposed \$15 billion in revenue from the state's Cap-and-Invest program funding through 2045, it also warns that stop-and-go financing—such as the recent Trump Administration decision to attempt to cancel \$4 billion in previously approved grants for the project, which is [currently being challenged through the courts](#)—leads to delays and increased costs. To accelerate delivery, the report recommends:

- Streamlining environmental and permitting processes;
- Enhancing third-party coordination; and
- Updating state laws to allow greater construction flexibility.

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 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!

[Toll of Commuting: How is NJ Transit doing one year after 'Summer of Hell?', News12 New Jersey](#)

A year removed from the "Summer of Hell", NJTransit held a "listening session" to hear directly from passengers on the progress made and what still needs to be done to make sure history doesn't repeat itself.

[Will Penn Station be Trump's next Operation Warp Speed?, Gothamist](#)

With Amtrak now leading the project and former NYC Transit President Andy Byford at the helm, officials are invoking the spirit of "Operation Warp Speed" to fast-track long-delayed renovations at Penn Station.

[VPRA data shows delayed trains all too common for commuters, Henrico Citizen](#)

Despite record ridership, Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VPRA) data reveals persistent delays across regional and long-distance Amtrak routes. In July alone, 487 regional trains averaged just 52% on-time performance - over 17,000 minutes of delay.

[Boot Road Bridge in Chester County to Close for Yearlong Replacement Project, MyChesCo](#)

The Boot Road Bridge, which carries both Amtrak & SEPTA trains, in East Caln Township (PA) will close for approximately one year starting Monday (Sept. 8th) as part of a \$13.3M full replacement project led by PennDOT.

[TRI-RAIL TROUBLES: Chances of rail service surviving are '50/50,' director says, WPTV](#)

With Palm Beach County pulling \$30M in support and state funding slashed, weekend service cuts and fare hikes may be on the horizon for passengers in South Florida.

[Commuter Rail fare gates being installed at South Station in Boston, WCVB](#)

The gates, aimed at improving fare collection and streamlining access, will be operational this winter.

[Why Uptown transit hub remains on hold, WSOC](#)

Plans for a centralized transit hub in Uptown Charlotte remain stalled, despite years of discussion, with funding challenges and shifting priorities leaving commuters and planners uncertain about the future of the project.

[SF: Bart Reports Major Delay In Transbay Tube Between Embarcadero And West Oakland, SF Gate](#)

BART service between Embarcadero and West Oakland was severely disrupted last Friday evening due to equipment issues and reports of smoke in the Transbay Tube.



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) 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

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BRUCE ASHTON
TOM & CHRISTY COMPSON
ROBERT FRAMPTON
GARY MOLINE
J.R. PRICE
MICHAEL ROBINSON
MILES SCHULZE

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**, prepared for an upcoming meeting of the Surface Transportation Board's Passenger Rail Advisory Committee, as well as meeting with both majority and minority staffs of the Senate Commerce Committee.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, responded to several inquiries from Senate offices regarding surface transportation reauthorization policy proposals, talked with reporters about USDOT announcements regarding stations and infrastructure projects along the Northeast Corridor, and prepared his presentation for next week's Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority event in Montana.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, spent time this week working with our Accounting partners to close July financials as well as beginning closing August, and tending to the administrative/operational needs of the Association.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, continued working on this year's fall meeting, started the pre-planning process of selecting the location for the fall 2026 event, and spoke to a number of our supporters on relevant passenger rail issues.
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, spent this week catching up on correspondence following the extended holiday weekend, responding to member inquiries, and assisting constituents with accessing their accounts. As always, she continues to support our members by answering questions, troubleshooting account concerns, and ensuring they have the resources they need to make the most of their membership experience.

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

Password

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!

**SHOW YOUR SUPPORT
ALL SUMMER LONG!**

RAILPASSENGERS.ORG/STORE

[Visit our Store](#) [Discuss This Week's Hotline](#)



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**

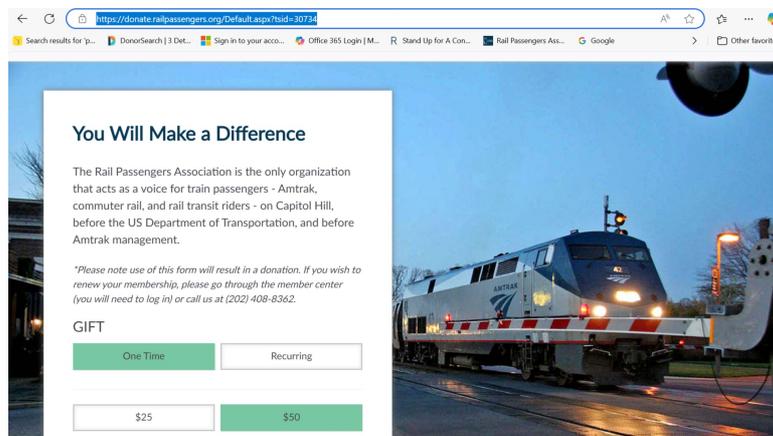
[CLICK HERE](#)

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>



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!

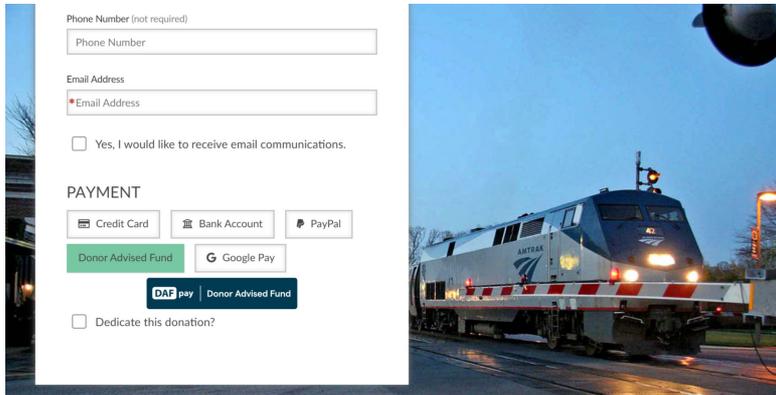
With multiple secure, protected methods of payment, you have more flexibility in the way dues are paid. Skip the hassle and [contact us](#) today for help setting up automatic or online payments.

- 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

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Yes, I would like to receive email communications.

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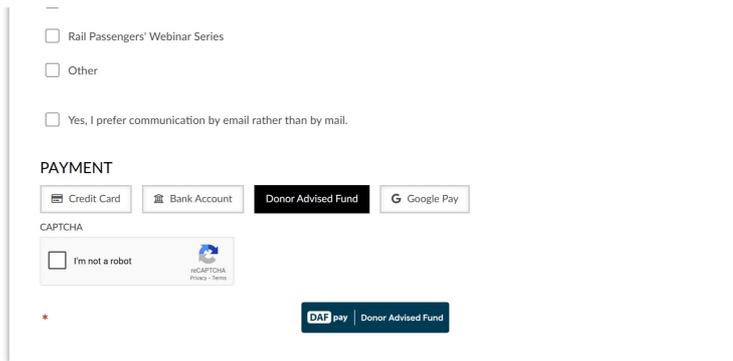
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Membership Form:



Rail Passengers' Webinar Series

Other

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

PAYMENT

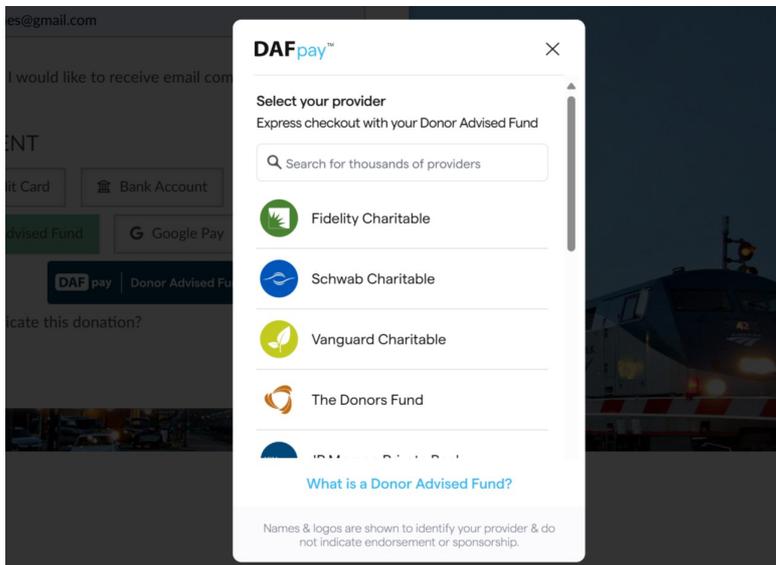
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[What is a Donor Advised Fund?](#)

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

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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.



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.



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