

RAIL PASSENGERS
ASSOCIATION

FRIDAY HOTLINE

#1427

FEBRUARY 6TH, 2026



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Association News

Capitol Hill Roundup: Feb. 6th Edition

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

It's been an eventful week for passenger rail in Washington, D.C. Your Association has been tracking all the news on behalf of America's train passengers.

Hudson River Tunnel Standoff Finds New Focus: Trump Station?

The largest passenger rail construction project in the country—and one of the largest construction projects of *any* kind—was forced to initiate a work drawdown yesterday in the face of a decision by the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) to freeze disbursement of previously approved infrastructure funding for the Hudson Tunnel Project (HTP).

Now, Punchbowl News and [CNN are reporting](#) that the President Donald Trump has offered Senate Minority Leader a deal: rename Penn Station in New York City and Washington's Dulles International Airport in Northern Virginia after Trump, and the USDOT will unfreeze funding for the HTP.

Neither Senator Schumer's office nor the White House have responded publicly to the story.



[\[Take Action: Ask your member of Congress to restore funding for this vital passenger rail program!\]](#)

If true, it would be a shocking rationale for putting 1,000 workers out of a job, endangering 95,000 jobs in total, and halting a project critical to the stability of the national rail network—and, indeed, the entire U.S. economy. (As we [first reported in October](#), even the nominal reason offered by the USDOT is insufficient to halt a project of this magnitude.)

In the meantime, the Gateway Development Commission (GDC) [has launched a lawsuit against the federal government for breach of contract](#).

"Today is a setback," GDC CEO Tom Prendergast said yesterday. "The Gateway Development Commission has expended every resource to prevent any interruption to the construction, but we've gone as far as we can go."

The construction delay will be a costly one. Not only did 1,000 workers lose their job this week, putting construction on hiatus will cost an estimated \$15 to \$20 million each month.

Government Shutdown Mercifully Brief

The partial US government shutdown ended Tuesday after only four days after a bipartisan compromise that split funding for the Department of Homeland Security off from the rest of the five funding bills.

The FY26 transportation bill appropriates \$2.4 billion for Amtrak, including \$1.6 billion for the National Network (NN) and \$850 million for the Northeast Corridor (NEC).

It also includes \$65 million for the Federal State Partnership for Intercity Rail Program—\$10 million below FY25 levels, but \$65 million above what was included in the House GOP proposal in the summer.

You can read [our full analysis of the bill here](#).

Coalition of House Republicans Wants to See Clear Benefits Before UP and NS Merger Approved

A coalition of 46 House Republicans wrote a letter to the Surface Transportation Board (STB) this week, asking the regulator to “conduct a rigorous and comprehensive review of the proposed merger between Union Pacific Railroad (UP) and Norfolk Southern Railway (NS) to ensure it enhances competition and is clearly in the public interest.”

[The letter highlighted the needs](#) of domestic manufacturers, farmers, the energy sector, and American consumers in asking the STB, while also pointing to service disruptions and degradations that resulted from prior mergers:

As representatives of states and congressional districts that rely on competitive and reliable rail service to move goods essential to the U.S. economy, we have a strong interest in ensuring transactions that could concentrate market power, reduce competition, or degrade service are carefully scrutinized. Also, and consistent with the Trump Administration’s pro-growth economic agenda, we remain keenly focused on ensuring government decision-making does not result in the costs of goods and services going up for American businesses and consumers.

Some of us are already hearing initial concerns about the UP-NS application and its lack of serious and meaningful commitments to enhance competition and protect against service meltdowns. In light of this, the Board must consider with extreme care the potential risks posed by this transaction to determine whether it meets the public interest test.

For more, [read Rail Passengers' Jim Mathews latest analysis](#) of where the proposed UP and NS merger stands.

Amtrak is Still Fighting the Elements

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

Yesterday's news that Amtrak is having to cancel 20 trains on the Northeast Corridor is part of an ongoing battle with exceptionally harsh winter conditions and their lingering effects on equipment availability.

Amtrak blamed a combination of winter-weather-related equipment issues and units still unavailable for service for [cancellations yesterday and today](#) -- seven Acela, ten Northeast Regional, and three Keystone Service trains. Locomotive reliability in bad weather has become a pressing issue and Amtrak really needs to get a handle on it. At the same time, this has been an exceptionally tough winter for nearly all modes of travel. That doesn't make it any easier on passengers, but let's put this week's service changes into a larger context.

In late January at the height of Winter Storm Fern (I hate naming winter storms, but [this one really deserved it](#)), Amtrak's operational statistics show that even on the storm's worst day, roughly 60 % of planned trains operated, with service returning to about 85% – 90 % of planned capacity within just a few days.

No, that's not perfect. But I'd argue that this reflects a targeted and geographically constrained disruption in the storm's core footprint rather than a systemwide collapse, and that's a real contrast to what we saw in the Nation's skies. It also highlights a disciplined approach to safety; cancellations were deployed where conditions or host railroad issues made movement unsafe. And most passengers were told in advance that their trains were going to be canceled. Not so for airline passengers, many of whom found themselves camping in airport waiting rooms without ever being told outright that an aircraft would never come.

Compare that to the airline system during the same storm: national carriers canceled roughly 30% – 35 % of scheduled flights at the peak of the storm, more or less comparable to Amtrak. But double-digit cancellation rates

persisted for several days as aircraft and crews were mispositioned. That's a classic example of how hub-and-spoke networks amplify disruption far beyond the storm's actual footprint. There's a saying that the multiple of anecdote isn't data, but I can personally attest to being delayed from Friday night around 9:30 to nearly 3:30 Saturday morning a full five days after the storm hit. Amtrak, by contrast, by that time had resumed operating at near full capacity.

In this light, Amtrak is indeed putting up a tough fight against the elements. It's not perfect, but the railroad is managing operational continuity where it's safe to do so while adjusting schedules where weather and equipment realities demand it. That's a degree of resilience that is often underappreciated in public conversation and the social-media anger chamber. Even under severe winter conditions, Amtrak degraded service deliberately and recovered steadily, while the airline system experienced nationwide cascading disruptions extending well beyond the storm itself.

In other words, when severe weather hit, passenger rail behaved like critical infrastructure -- degrading gracefully -- while much of the airline system experienced wholesale collapse.

Field Notes

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](#) 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 Joe Aiello @ jaiello@narprail.org with the subject "HOTLINE PHOTO"

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!

[N.Y., N.J. sue Trump administration over Gateway Tunnel funds, which are set to run out Friday](#), CBS New York

There is not much you will get the Garden and Empire states to agree on - sports, food, music, etc - but they are standing united in their fight against the Trump administration's freeze of funding for the Hudson Tunnel Project

[Why Minnesota's Northstar Service Was Doomed From the Start, Strong Towns](#)

"Northstar wasn't a transportation project that failed. It was a funding project that succeeded." Strong Towns Founder Charles Marohn gives a sobering look at the start and sadly predictable end of commuter rail service out of the Twin Cities.

[Western North Carolina Rail Corridor Economic Impact, NCDOT](#)

NC DOT's Rail Division has released an economic impact study (something we at the Association are very familiar with) of returning passenger rail to the Salisbury to Asheville corridor for the first time since 1975.

[MTA boss Janno Lieber taps Jessie Lazarus to oversee MTA's \\$12B purchase of new trains and buses](#), amNewYork

The MTA has a new Chief of Rolling Stock to lead the agency's \$12B replacement program.

[**Illinois legislators take questions on passenger rail, public safety during Chamber review**](#), Belleville News-Democrat

A bipartisan group of state legislators in Illinois met with residents in Rock Island last Friday to give updates from the statehouse - including the ongoing process to bring passenger rail from Chicago to the Quad Cities.

[**Amtrak Urges World Cup Fans To Book Early**](#), Newsweek

It's going to be a VERY busy summer.

[**What's the latest on Madison-to-Milwaukee Amtrak service?**](#), Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

While it is all still in the development stage, "Hiawatha West" service between Milwaukee and Madison is still very much on the table with hopes have it running by the end of the decade.

[**Roanoke looking to build train station at Amtrak platform**](#), WDBJ

Over 100k passengers a year get on and off the train in Roanoke, VA. City officials are hoping to give them a bit more comfort in the near future.

[**Potential LIRR strike delayed until May as MTA pushes for work rule changes**](#), News 12 Long Island

With a possible workers strike still looming in the distance, the LIRR contract disputes were a hot topic during an MTA legislative meeting earlier this week.



**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



[**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 for more information.



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 for more information.

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!

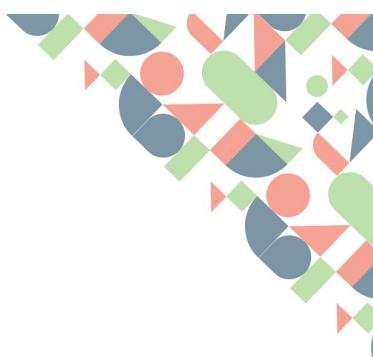
Staff Updates

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**, was in Denver this week doing some homework on Denver's RTD light-rail system and the Front Range Rail project. He returns to DC next week.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, worked with a number of individuals who have volunteered to be part of our growing Legislative Advocacy Corps, while also developing legislative language to address the growing insurance premiums threatening U.S. commuter railroad service.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, is at home recovering from surgery on her arm.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, set up a number of meetings for the upcoming "field trip" to Toledo, launched an action alert for the current fight over Hudson Tunnel funding, and continued talking to people about a number of issues & topics around the country.
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, is on vacation this week

Apply for Volunteer Staff at Rail Passengers Association

**VOLUNTEERS
NEEDED**



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](#)

We Have Merch!

New items available!



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.

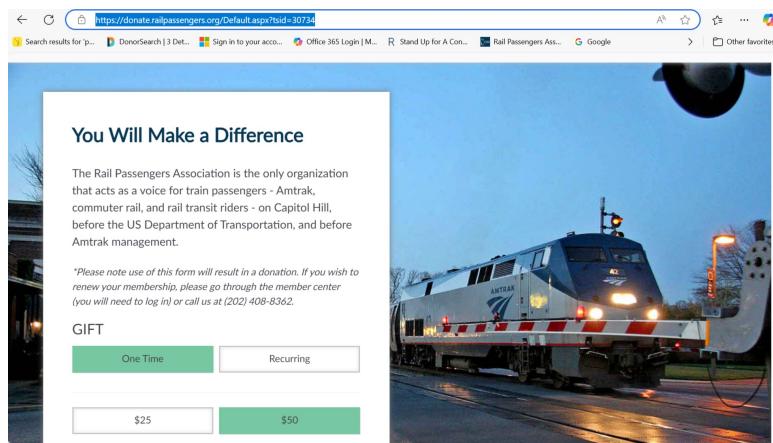
[CLICK HERE](#)

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>



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)

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Yes, I would like to receive email communications.

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Membership Form:

Rail Passengers' Webinar Series

Other

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

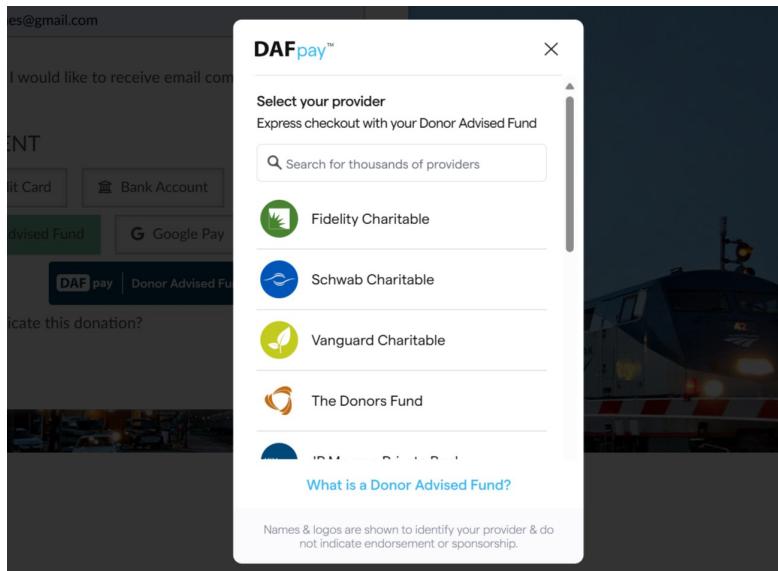
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 1200 G Street, NW
 Suite 520
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 Contact: Jonsie Stone, jstone@narprail.org
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Member & Donor Notices

- 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.



THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS:



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