



Photo credit: Joe Aiello



FRIDAY HOTLINE

#1429

FEBRUARY 20<sup>TH</sup>, 2026



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

[Click here](#) for instructions.

## Association News

### Rail Passengers Association Issues Statement on Reports of a Potential Organizational Restructuring of Amtrak

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has revealed that it is directing Amtrak to undertake a dramatic organizational restructuring, breaking itself into three distinct operational entities within an umbrella holding company, focusing on operations, rolling stock management and leasing, and infrastructure management and construction. The FRA [teased the restructuring](#) at an event held by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials Council on Rail Transportation last week. Additionally, [Bloomberg covered expressions of concern from a leading labor organization](#) that the potential restructuring could lead to the eventual privatization of Amtrak's operations.

*Rail Passengers* has received an initial briefing on the proposed restructuring from FRA officials, with more in depth briefings scheduled. The outline of the proposal, which will presumably be fleshed out through a public process over the coming months, involves the National Railroad Passenger Corporation (NRPC), currently doing business as Amtrak, acting as a holding company for three distinct and separate subsidiaries: an infrastructure management entity, a rolling stock management entity, and an operational entity.

Jim Mathews, President & CEO of Rail Passengers, issued the following statement in light of early reports on the potential restructuring:

*"When done correctly, there are potential benefits to a structural reorganization. However, the experiences of European and Asian railways tell us there are clear and present dangers to this kind of restructuring. If done incorrectly, it can lead to service reductions, elimination of routes, increased fares for passengers, and even degradations in infrastructure and safety.*

*Critically, in the absence of predictable and sufficient public funding, this restructuring is certain to fail. To the extent that this is an attempt to reduce public investment in the national passenger rail system, it will have predictable results: privatization of profits, socialization of losses, deferred investment in infrastructure, and the degradation of frequencies and service quality -- particularly for routes that serve rural and small town America.*

*Additionally, there must be buy-in from the U.S. Congress and States; any restructuring that isn't done in conjunction with the Congressional debate over the shape of the surface transportation reauthorization and state-level network planning will be DOA.*

*Rail Passengers stands ready to be an active participant in the conversation over how, or if, this restructuring should take place."*

In the absence of firm details, rail industry stakeholders are struggling to determine the downstream effects. *Bloomberg* reported that the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET) issued a memo to its members sounding alarm over the potential consequences of a restructuring of labor agreements for the roughly 18,000 unionized Amtrak workers.

"Shifts of this nature raise legitimate and substantive concerns regarding the maintenance of qualifications, preservation of established work jurisdiction, crew utilization practices, pilot requirements, and, most importantly, the continued protection and enforcement of existing Agreement rights," wrote Patrick Darcy, chair of the Amtrak General Committee of Adjustment for the BLET.

For its part, the U.S. Department of Transportation denies that the move is part of a privatization scheme -- though it has yet to release a detailed proposal.

"The Trump Administration is considering ways to strengthen and modernize Amtrak for the future, but privatization is not under consideration," Danna Almeida, a spokesperson for the Department of Transportation, told *Bloomberg* in response to inquiries.

[\[TO READ THE FULL PRESS RELEASE AND SYNOPSIS, CLICK HERE\]](#)

## Clock Starts On New UPNS Application

*by Jim Mathews / President & CEO*

Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern [told the Surface Transportation Board this week](#) that they expect to re-file their merger application, and that they'll do so by April 30. The STB last month [unanimously rejected](#) the railroads' first application as incomplete.

For your *Rail Passengers Association* staff, that act officially starts the clock. By statute, we'll have 45 days to file any responsive comments to that re-filed application, so by mid-June we'll have to be on the record making sure the passenger's voice gets counted as the Board considers the ramifications of the largest railroad merger in the history of the U.S.

Even though we won't know all of those potential ramifications until the new application is filed, we know the map won't change, the combination won't change, and the scale and scope of this transaction will create a behemoth Class I railroad that will give a single private company, which is mostly unaccountable to the public, an effective veto over any expansion or growth in America's passenger rail service.

That's why your Association staff has already been hard at work examining each route that might be hurt, looking for conflicts and asking questions about mitigations.

In its [decision rejecting the original application](#), STB noted that while the application "attempts to include" all potentially affected commuter and passenger services hosted by UP and NS, even those where -- for now at least -- the railroads aren't contemplating adding any more freight trains, "the Application appears to omit entirely several services hosted by UP and NS, and fails to address impacts on some other services. Applicants shall provide an impact analysis and Service Assurance Plan details for the omitted passenger and commuter services or explain otherwise why they are not needed."

The message was clear: 'show your work.' We intend to scrutinize those re-filed documents very closely, and we've pulled together a team of a dozen Association experts, along with some outside allies, to build the framework we'll need to dive into that new application right away.

[\[CLICK HERE FOR MORE\]](#)

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## Field Notes

### Air-Rail Alliances Make Travel Easier While Helping the Environment

*by Philip Mayer, Association Volunteer Blogger*

An Air-Rail Alliance allows a traveler to book part of a journey on a train and another leg of the journey on an airplane. These alliances, which have existed since the early 2000s, offer convenience for the traveler, increase train usage, and allow airlines to reach smaller cities than their networks can usually reach. These alliances also incentivize train ridership over personal automobile or air travel to smaller cities, which offers major environmental

benefits.

Dedicated service is the most attractive service to travelers. Connections and seat reservations are guaranteed, luggage is checked all the way through to the final destination, and very often train passengers with airline connections will be given dedicated train cars. Dedicated service is often not available to and from every airport and train station.

An example of a dedicated service is both American Airlines and Air France offer direct connections from Paris-Charles de Gaulle Airport to Brussels-Midi train station, with Air France also offering a connection to Strasbourg.

Entire Network Access, more commonly referred to as Rail&Fly allows customers to book separate rail and air tickets for the same journey. The connection and rail seat reservation are not guaranteed, and train passengers with air tickets are not given a dedicated train car. However, the train tickets are very frequently heavily discounted or even free. If enrolled in a frequent flyers program, passengers will typically accrue air miles while riding the train if the tickets were booked through an air-rail alliance.

Railway companies in Germany, France, and Taiwan offer Rail&Fly partnerships with several domestic and international airlines between rail destinations throughout their nations.

[\[FOR MORE ON THESE ALLIANCES, CLICK HERE TO CONTINUE ON OUR SITE\]](#)

**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 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!*

[Amtrak Mardi Gras service exceeds projected ridership, NBC 15 News](#)

Amtrak's original forecast for Mardi Gras ridership was 60k in its first year of service. Six months in and it has already flown past that number.

[A free, 5-week bus program could be implemented during the World Cup in NYC, Timeout](#)

Pending approval by the MTA, one of NYC Mayor Mamdani's signature campaign pledges could see its beginning stages - during the world's biggest sporting event.

[Austin Transit Partnership Selects Contractor to Help Build Austin Light Rail, PR Newswire](#)

A partnership between firms with local and national experience has been chosen to plan and build Austin's fully electric, 10-mile, 15 station light rail system.

[New Orleans couple rides Amtrak to experience first Mobile Mardi Gras, WKRG](#)

A New Orleans couple hopped on Amtrak's Mardi Gras Service for their first-ever celebration in the Port City - a very different vibe from what they are used to in the Big Easy

[‘T: An MBTA Musical’ celebrates the best-worst subway](#), **The Mass Media**

And now for something completely different...

[Congressman Mike Thompson secures \\$13.3 million for local various projects](#), **Daily Democrat**

Included in Rep Mike Thompson (CA-04)'s funding request is \$1M for a pedestrian and bike connection for improved access to the Davis Amtrak Depot

[L.A.-to-Vegas Brightline West rail completion pushed to 2029](#), **Equipment World**

It looks like Brightline West will miss their LA28 target and open after the Olympics have long wrapped up - and for nearly double the cost.

[Reps. Mast and Frost introduce Safer Rail Crossing Act to enhance infrastructure](#), **WFTV 9**

Reps. Mast (FL-21) & Frost (FL-10) have introduced the Safer Rail Crossing Act to expand access to funding for crossing upgrades like better detection systems, improved gates, and clearer warnings - after a year with 20+ railrelated accidents in Florida.

[Amtrak's Iconic Train Route 66 Trip Starts in Chicago And Stops At One Of The 7 Natural Wonders Of The World—Here's The Full Itinerary](#), **Secret Chicago**

While not an official Amtrak offering (this is being done by Amtrak Vacations, which licenses the railroad's name), this is still a great way to see some of the iconic Route 66 without the hassle of traffic.



**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.

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## Upcoming Events

### Advocacy Workshops + Council Business Meeting

**RAIL PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION**

**2026 DC 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.



### [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

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**, spent the week in Toledo, Ohio, laying the groundwork for our RailNation fall conference. The trip included site visits to ensure that the facilities will be available and will have all the support that we need for the meeting, such as Internet, catering, seating, and so forth. Jim also held meetings with Destination Toledo, the Toledo Metropolitan Area Council of Governments, the Toledo Port Authority, the Toledo Chamber of Commerce, and Toledo Mayor Wade Kapszukiewicz.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, worked with stakeholder organizations on developing legislative language for the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization, while also working with Amtrak to help passengers better understand the railroad's efforts to renew its fleet of railcars.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, worked on fundraising messages, processed membership dues and donations and tended to the Association's administrative/operational needs.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, joined Jim Mathews (see his update above) and Association Board member Stu Nicholson in Toledo this week to set the stage for our conference in the Glass City later this year.
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, continues to work closely with our members to assist with account access, username retrieval, password resets, and the addition of sub-memberships for qualifying membership levels.

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## Apply for Volunteer Staff at 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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## We Have Merch!

New items available!



 Visit our Store	 Discuss This Week's Hotline
 Service Updates & Timetables	 Visit the General Membership Group
 View Webinars	 Rail Passengers' Social Media

 **Take Action**

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## Rail Passengers Timetables





RAIL PASSENGERS  
ASSOCIATION

# TIMETABLE UPDATE!

[railpassengers.org/timetables](http://railpassengers.org/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.

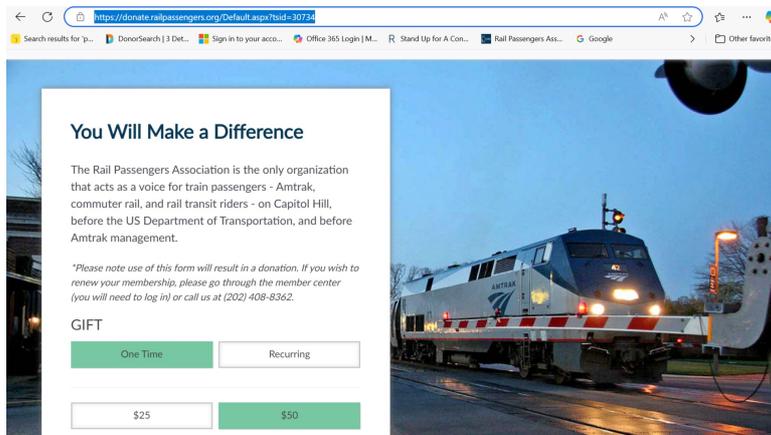
[CLICK HERE](#)

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

Email Address  
\*Email Address

Yes, I would like to receive email communications.

PAYMENT

Donor Advised Fund

Dedicate this donation?

#### Membership Form:

Rail Passengers' Webinar Series

Other

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

PAYMENT

CAPTCHA

I'm not a robot

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.

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

Names & logos are shown to identify your provider & do not indicate endorsement or sponsorship.

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

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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](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](#).

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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.**



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**THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS:**



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EST. 1967

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