



Photo credit: Jeff Hutchins



FRIDAY HOTLINE

#1403

JULY 25TH, 2025



Take Action

Association News

Senate Advances DOT Budget With \$2.9 Billion for Rail

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

The Senate Committee on Appropriations approved the Fiscal Year 2026 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies (THUD) Appropriations Act earlier today by a vote of 27 to 1. The bill funds Amtrak at \$2.4 billion, equal to the levels requested in [the White House budget proposal](#).

"It is critical that we make significant investments to modernize our air traffic control systems and improve our airports, roads, railways, bridges, and ports," [said Senator Susan Collins \(R-ME\), Chair of the Appropriations Committee](#).

Critically, the bipartisan Senate bill rejects several [short-sighted moves included in the House version](#), which raided funding for future intercity passenger rail upgrades to pay for present-day Amtrak operations and slashed funding to important transit grant programs.

While the official text of the bill hasn't been posted on the Committee website, the Majority [has released a bill summary](#).

[Rail Passengers will update this post when the bill's text is posted.](#)

"What I Learned On My Summer [Internship]"

With *The Fund for American Studies (TFAS)* summer program coming to a close this week, our three remarkable interns reflect on the time they spent in DC for the Association.

Sometimes a goodbye is just another boarding call. A quick pause on the platform before the next train rolls in. That's how I feel as I wrap up my summer with Rail Passengers and write to the members, donors, and allies who made these months unforgettable.

I arrived with a simple fondness for trains. I'm leaving with a clear set of skills and a deeper conviction that passenger rail is more than heritage. Its practical value, economic opportunity, and social connection rolled together. Under Jim's steady guidance, Jonsie's tactical knowhow, Joe Aiello's Northeast hustle, and Sean JeansGail's policy firepower, I learned how to turn passion into practical leverage.

While Maxwell and Maximilian dove deep into policy, drafting the briefs that armed our leadership with facts for hearings and interviews. I focused on building connections in the digital space. My days were spent sharpening socialmedia copy, tracking engagement metrics, and testing new ways to turn a casual scroll into an active supporter. Every retweet, share, and comment we secured this summer helped amplify the case for projects like the Heartland Flyer and for investments in better equipment and true accessibility nationwide.

I saw our small staff turn nostalgia into real impact and real impact into tangible value. Each dollar we secure for Amtrak or a state corridor flows straight to families who need a reliable, affordable ride to a new job, a medical appointment, or a grandchild's birthday. That's profit measured in connections, not just cash.

The fights ahead; new rolling stock, expanded corridors, universal accessibility—are real, but so is the dedication I've witnessed. A CEO spending weekends refining language so a wheelchair user in Oklahoma or anywhere can travel with dignity. Members who answer every action alert within minutes. Supporters who give five dollars because trains once carried them to their very first job. That kind of commitment tells me passenger rail has champions equal to the mission.

So here's my ask before I hop off this train: stay loud, stay curious, stay generous. Share the alert, forward the newsletter, chip in if you can. Each act of support helps lay the track that future generations will ride to work, to family, to new adventures. One post, one letter, one mile at a time, we build the network our communities deserve.

Thank you for the best ticket a transit lover could ask for. I'm proud of what we achieved together, and I can't wait to see where the next stretch of rail will lead.

Warm regards,
Rifqa Kadhim

The truly interesting part about working for a non-profit group like the Rail Passengers is their ability to connect with their members and donors as frequently as possible, given their small staff compared to other interest groups. From a 22-year-old's perspective, it's quite inspiring to see the amount of advocacy and research work we have completed with fewer resources than the big boys. In these last few weeks, it has been evident that donations are needed now, more than ever, to fight against this administration's cuts to many government-funded programs, but especially rail transit. Ensuring that all Americans have complete access to rail transit is critical to economic growth, and that's why they need your support.

This summer, I had the privilege to work with this group. I thought it was extremely fascinating to work on projects within an office and to then attend hearings within the federal government regarding the topic that we were working on. After being in a classroom at The Ohio State University for four years completing my degree, it's cool to experience this type of policy and advocacy work firsthand, and I intend on volunteering with their staff researching after my fellow intern's and my academic internship program has concluded.

That's how much I wanna help their cause, why can't you?

Max Middleton

When I got this job offer, I remember that I couldn't help but smile. I remember thinking how my kid self would feel knowing I'm writing about trains in D.C. over the summer. However, over the course of these two months, I've grown to appreciate passenger rail beyond that child-like enthusiasm, and in a far deeper, nuanced, and informed capacity. I've attended hearings, read policy, and written countless advocacy pieces.

Above all else, I've learned a very simple truth about passenger trains: These are real machines.

Right about now, you're probably looking at that last sentence and thinking "man, the interns this year are exceptionally out of touch."

But I mean it. Many people in passenger rail advocacy have this tendency to fall victim to this very nostalgic place about trains – and I am no exception. But I've realized that when we take that perspective, when we look at passenger trains as relics of the past instead of machines of public good, it ends up selling them massively short. Not even massively. It sells passenger rail entirely short of what it is. Passenger rail was never "once great" – it still is.

Every story I've heard over the past few months, every "in-the-weeds" anecdote seems to prove this. For many Americans, long-distance transport services are a vital component to their livelihoods and way of life. For others, it's the only way their communities can connect itself to the rest of the nation. And for some, it's just an easy way to get around. Passenger rail may not look the way it did 50-some years ago, but that's no reason to knock it.

The greatest lesson I will take forth with into future passenger rail advocacy is this simple truth. What we advocate for isn't a pleasant vestige of a bygone era. It's real people, real communities, and powerful change. From Meridian, Mississippi to Bangor, Maine to Madera, California.

Max Pohlenz

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](#) 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!

[Rail Advocates Say Brightline's Shocking Safety Numbers Are Part of a Bigger Problem](#), USA Streetsblog

Our boss, Jim Mathews, talked to Streetsblog USA's Kea Wilson for this piece on the ongoing safety issues in Florida regarding Brightline service and the report resulting from a year-long Miami Herald investigation into the rail operator.

[Amtrak: Service to Berkshires suspended due to large hole](#), WNYT.com NewsChannel 13

While it's never good news to have train service shut down for such an extended time and replaced with buses - especially with the higher fares passengers are paying - but safety should be everyone's highest priority.

[Direct Amtrak train service returns for 2025 Great New York State Fair](#), Rochester First

Tickets are on sale now for daily service to the 13-day Great New York State Fair.

[Chicago's Union Station celebrates 100 years of service](#), WGN-TV

And still gorgeous after all these years. Happy 100th, CUS.

[Local artist unveils mural in Biloxi ahead of Amtrak's return to Gulf Coast](#), WLOX

The "Playground of the South" is getting ready to welcome visitors traveling on Amtrak's Mardi Gras service.

[Andy Byford on Penn Station's 'transformation'](#), City & State New York

With a vision rooted in community input, architectural ambition, and transit innovation, "Train Daddy" is promising a station worthy of New York's future.

[FlatironDragados, Herzog JV to start \\$414M Virginia rail job](#), Construction Dive

With over 70 daily trains in the corridor, the \$414M Franconia-Springfield Bypass will be a game-changer for both passenger and freight efficiency.

[MTA has installed platform barriers at more than 50 NYC subway stations](#), 6sqft

According to MTA surveys, 59% of riders—and 88% of those over 65—support the barriers, citing improved safety and peace of mind.

[News Photos: Amtrak's first Airo train readied for departure](#), Trains

[Brightline's Tampa Expansion Gains Support from I-4 Corridor Leaders Despite Heavy Financial Losses](#), Florida Daily

Despite reporting a \$116M net loss in Q1 2024, Brightline remains focused

on the future, and is earning strong support from leaders across Florida's I-4 corridor - such as the Greater Orlando Sports Commission & the Orlando Economic Partnership.

[New LAX/Metro Transit Center boosts K Line light rail](#), **Progressive Railroading**

Since its debut on June 6, LA Metro's K Line has seen a dramatic surge in ridership—up 139.5% on weekdays, 198.9% on Saturdays, and 214.9% on Sundays

[Downtown multimodal station gets design funds](#), **NEOtrans**

The City of Cleveland has received a \$960,000 USDOT grant to support the design of a new North Coast Connector Multimodal Hub, a proposed 150,000 sq. ft. facility aims to unify Amtrak, RTA's Waterfront Line, and intercity bus services into a single, integrated transit center.



[WE ARE NOW ON BLUE SKY!](#)

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

RailNation: San Antonio



[REGISTER NOW!](#)

Get Your Half-Off RailNation: San Antonio Rate!

Ready for a full weekend of learning, inspiration, and action? The contracts are signed, the venue is booked, the speaker invitations are out the door, and we're getting ready to enjoy a great time together in San Antonio from October 3rd through October 5th on the famous Riverwalk!

This year's [RailNation: San Antonio conference](#) gathers grassroots advocates, transportation professionals, and elected leaders from across the country. We'll explore progress in places like [the Gulf Coast](#) and the MSP-Chicago corridor with the Borealis, as well as [Brightline's rapid expansion](#), and how those stories can be replicated nationwide. We're putting together panel discussions on local transportation issues in Texas, presentations on the [Heartland Flyer](#), talks from top Amtrak leaders, a deep discussion with Amtrak and Brightline about taking care of customers, and so much more.

Anyone can come, and we hope that you'll join us! You don't have to be a [Rail Passengers member](#). You don't have to be a Rail Passengers Council member. You don't have to be a member of leadership. If you want more and better trains, your voice – working right where you live, work, or play – is how we'll make it happen, together.

And that's why **YOU** should come to San Antonio to get the latest updates, hear directly from rail leaders face-to-face, and to learn from fellow advocates about strategies that have worked around the country to get new trains running.

We've also tried very hard this year to make attendance more affordable for everyone – younger advocates, folks with families, fixed-income retirees, students. **Hotels and meeting rooms unavoidably cost money, but thanks to some sponsorships and hard work by the professional staff, for a limited time only we can offer a full three-day in-person registration for just \$96. (In-person, not virtual!)**

That's three days of presentations, conversations, and talking directly with top rail leaders and policymakers about how we break the logjams that stop us from getting more trains, to more places, for more people, everywhere. All for 50 percent off the regular registration rate.

Our Fall conferences in the past have sometimes had to cost upwards of \$300 per attendee, and that puts it out of reach for a lot of people. That's why we've tried so hard to wring the best deals out of the hotels and suppliers, and to pare down every penny to make it easier for our grassroots rail supporters to take part.

The "Early Bird" rate of \$96 is only good until the end of July. Starting August 1, registration for the in-person event will be at the regular rate of \$192. That's still more affordable than some of our previous conferences, but why not act quickly to get 50 percent off?

Here's how to do it: visit our [online registration page, here](#). Enter the number of event tickets you'll need – one for each attendee. Enter your contact information, too.

If you'd like your name badge to read a particular way, or to use a nickname, tell us that on the form. Tell us about any dietary restrictions we might need to know about.

(We are an IRS-recognized 501c3 nonprofit organization, so if you'd like to make an additional donation you can do that on this form, also.)

At the end, you'll be asked for payment information. You can use a credit card, a direct debit on your bank account, or even Google Pay. You'll see a box labeled "Promo Code." **Type the code SAS50 into that box.** When you enter that code, you'll see the 50 percent applied. If you do this on August 1 or later, the discount code will not work. This Early Bird rate is only good until the end of July, and it's only good for in-person attendance.

We'd love to see you in San Antonio, spending some time on the Riverwalk, enjoying some great food and fellowship, and working together to bring more trains to more people everywhere in America! [Register today with the code SAS50 and snag that 50 percent discount!](#)

RN:SAS Event Page

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**, is on vacation this week.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, spent the week working with allied groups and Hill offices [on Fiscal Year 2026 budgeting action](#), spoke with reporters about safety issues affecting the rail industry, as well as polishing surface transportation proposals.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, dug out after being on vacation last week. Tied up summer projects with the interns before saying goodbye. Processed membership dues and donations sent to the DC office. Tended to Association operational/admin needed
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, continued planning for the fall meeting and spoke to a number of our advocacy partners about some upcoming events.
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, recently returned from vacation and wants to extend a sincere thank you to our members and constituents for their patience as she works to respond to email and voicemail inquiries. She is catching up as quickly as possible and appreciates your understanding. We are currently experiencing a small hiccup with our membership software that is affecting some newly signed-up members. Specifically, there is a delay in

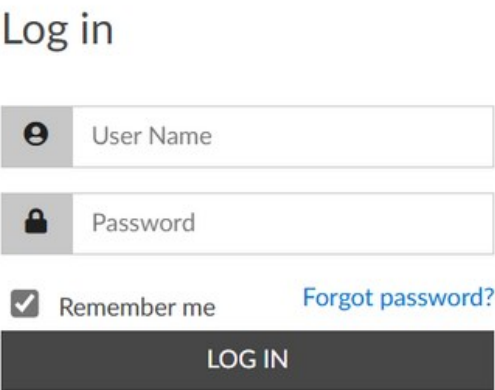
accessing the online portal until their memberships are manually approved. Once approved, full online access will be granted. If you're having trouble logging into your account or need assistance accessing your membership portal, please don't hesitate to reach out to Kimberly directly at KNotarianni@narprail.org

Starting **Wednesday, February 19th**, all membership, donation, and event registration transactions are being processed through **CharityEngine**. **Neon** is no longer the Association's CRM of record.

?? If you have the **Neon User Center** bookmarked, please update it to: <https://memberships.railpassengers.org/usercenter>.

?? Your **Neon username and Account ID** have already been transferred to CharityEngine. However, because your **password was unique to Neon**, you will need to reset it when logging in for the first time.

Below is a screenshot of the **CharityEngine Constituent Portal** for reference.



Over the coming weeks and months, we will continue to enhance the system. If you have any questions or need assistance, please [email Kimberly A. Notarianni](#)

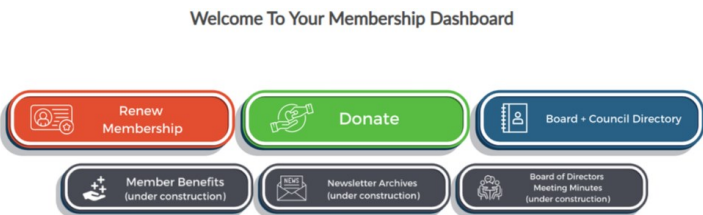
As with any upgrade, there may be minor hiccups. Your Association staff is here to help and if necessary, work with CharityEngine to gain the answers. We are excited by the full complement of options and benefits that will be available to our supporters through one system.

Thank you for your patience and cooperation.

?? New Dashboard Update in Your Constituent Portal!

When you access your constituent portal this week, you'll notice an exciting update to your **dashboard**!

We've added **new buttons** to make navigating your membership tools even easier:



Please note that some of the links are still under construction as we continue transitioning to our new software platform, **CharityEngine**.

?? Membership Renewals:

If you receive a renewal email, you can now access your renewal form directly through your dashboard or by clicking the link in the email.

?? Important Note for RENEWAL on Membership Display

The steps you take to **renew your membership** now mimic the "join" process. Don't be alarmed—your historical membership data from NEON has been successfully transferred to **CharityEngine**. The current renewal process is designed to help you **verify your contact information, Amtrak Guest Rewards preference, and communication settings**.

?? If your NEON membership was set to **auto-renew**, your membership will continue to auto-renew in CharityEngine as well. We encourage all members to **log in and review your account** to ensure everything looks correct.

You will be issued a **new RPA member number** through CharityEngine, but

your original number is still valid. You're welcome to use **either number** when purchasing Amtrak tickets.

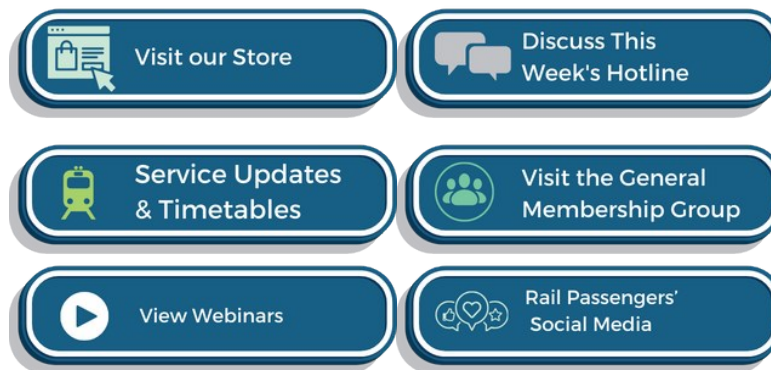
?? About Your New Member Number:

Your new membership number will contain **seven digits**.

?? **Only use the first SIX digits** if you're using your new CharityEngine number when prompted during an Amtrak ticket purchase. Amtrak hasn't updated their system yet to recognize the full 7-digit number.

?? Thank you for your patience as we continue working to enhance your member experience. We're committed to making the new portal smooth, intuitive, and reliable!

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**

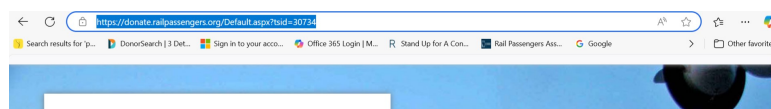
[CLICK HERE](#)

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

One Time

Recurring

\$25

\$50





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

Credit Card

Bank Account

PayPal


Donor Advised Fund

Google Pay

DAF pay

Donor Advised Fund

☐ Dedicate this donation?



Membership Form:

☐ Rail Passengers' Webinar Series

☐ Other

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

PAYMENT

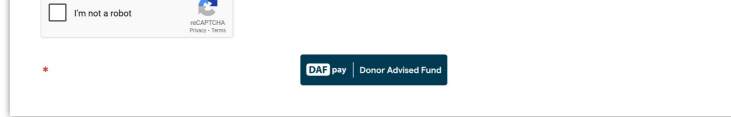
Credit Card

Bank Account

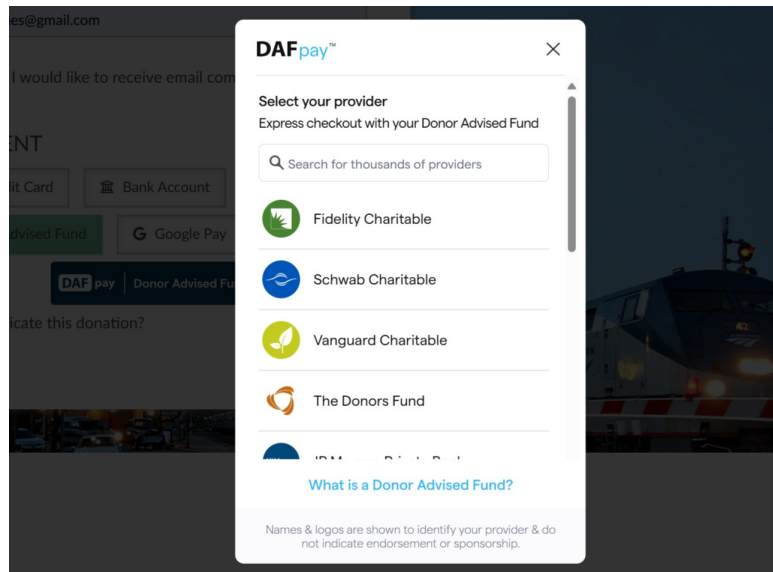
Donor Advised Fund

Google Pay

CAPTCHA



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 bucksliip, 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.



✦ **FOUR-STAR** ✦

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.



Contact Us

THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS:



RAIL PASSENGERS

EST. 1967

Rail Passengers Association
1200 G St. NW
Suite 520
Washington, DC 20005

P 202.408.8362
F 202.408.8287

www.railpassengers.org