



NOTICE: There will be no Hotline next week due to the 4th of July holiday. We will see you right back here on 7/11.

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"

Association News

DOJ Considering N-S Late-Trains Settlement Deal

By Jim Mathews / President & CEO

Are you angry about sitting on a late Amtrak train? Regulators and a Federal judge are still wrestling with late-train cases aimed at resolving late-train complaints related to dispatching decisions by freight railroads hosting Amtrak service.

Lost in the shuffle of a new Administration in DC, the Justice Dept.'s July, 2024, civil action accusing Norfolk Southern of violating the 52-year-old law requiring Amtrak to get priority from host railroad dispatchers remains open, with Justice currently reviewing a proposal from the railroad to resolve the case.

The government and the railroad are due to update Judge Amy Berman Jackson on the status of their negotiations on a potential settlement by July 11. Judge Jackson has granted the parties four extensions of time since the case began last year as they pursue an agreement.

Just as in the Amtrak versus Union Pacific case pending over at the Surface Transportation Board, the outcome turns on the question of what Congress meant when it used the word "preference" in the statute – 49 U.S.C. § 24308(c). The law reads that host railroads must give Amtrak "preference over freight transportation in using a rail line, junction, or crossing" unless: (1) there is an emergency; or (2) a host railroad asks the STB for relief, and the STB orders otherwise.

The Class I freight railroads have adopted the position that Amtrak is using "preference" to demand a kind of "presidential motorcade" level of exclusive track access diverting all other traffic, which Norfolk Southern and others argue is impossible.

Amtrak, DOJ, and this Association, contend that in practice nobody is actually adopting that sweeping a view of preference and that, in any case, the requirement for six months of sustained failure is a safeguard against one-time delay events being weaponized into unreasonable claims against host railroads. Moreover, if the freight railroads were really experiencing unreasonable demands from Amtrak for "presidential motorcade"-style access, then why have none of them ever sought relief from the STB over the half-century of the law's existence? The Justice Dept. noted in its own action filed last summer against Norfolk Southern that "no host railroad has ever sought, let alone been granted, such relief from STB."

[TO KEEP READING JIM'S THOUGHTS, PLEASE CLICK HERE]

Revisiting Long-Distance Fleet Plans

By Jim Mathews / President & CEO

Amtrak now expects to select a builder for its bi-level Superliner fleet replacement procurement in 2026, but will also speed plans to ask industry to bid on single-level long-distance equipment replacements as well.

Despite rumors of the Superliner replacement being put "on hold," your Association can confirm that this procurement remains underway. The supplier selection and contract award date have slipped several times, leading to speculation that the procurement might have to be scrapped. That's not the case.

What's happening is a continued iteration of design ideas and scope between Amtrak and the car-builders, trying to work through what is feasible, affordable, and can be built efficiently.

Amtrak tried to "front-load" those kinds of discussions with a detailed request-for-information, or RFI, a few years ago, and the railroad actually based some of its more controversial desires – including elevators for ADA access on bi-level cars – on industry's own responses in 2023 to what Amtrak asked was possible.

"The RFI question specifically asked how many different car types could be built simultaneously in a manufacturing facility without significantly impacting production," Amtrak noted in a formal response to <u>a December Inspector</u> <u>General report on the procurement</u>.

"Responses varied: two car builders stated there were no defined limits, one specified the ability to produce up to six car types and one did not provide, a quantified limit/range," Amtrak said. "This variation highlights the diverse capabilities within the industry providing a more comprehensive and balanced perspective on the responses received. It is crucial to avoid overgeneralizing the capabilities of a single car builder as indicative of the broader industry landscape."

[FOR MORE, CLICK HERE]

Intern Insight: Attending a Senate Hearing on Modernizing America's Rail Network

By Maxwell Middleton, Rail Passengers Summer Intern

Last week, Max Pohlenz—my colleague and fellow intern—and I attended a Senate hearing on *Modernizing America's Rail Network* within the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. As interns for the Rail Passengers Association, we've been assigned projects that directly relate to the topics discussed, making this hearing an incredibly unique and relevant experience.

Each panelist spoke about grants awarded in recent years under the Biden administration, particularly through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), such as the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant. As the discussion turned to CRISI, Senator Ted Cruz focused on aspects of the grant he opposed—specifically its Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) components and climate change initiatives. In doing so, he shifted attention away from the grant's core goals: economic impact, technological innovation, and improvements in rail safety and efficiency.

I found this to be a political move, especially when he remarked, "I'm grateful we now have an administration willing to follow the law instead of the preceding administration." In my opinion, that was an unnecessary jab. The CRISI grant offers far more value to the average American rider than what Senator Cruz portrayed during the brief five minutes he was present at the hearing. It was frustrating to see the so-called "chairman" attend only briefly, dismiss the importance of the IIJA, take a swipe at the previous administration, and then leave without returning.

Thankfully, other senators—on both sides of the aisle—asked thoughtful, relevant questions. For instance, Senator Luján emphasized the role of local governments and first responders in helping low-income Americans, particularly Native American communities in New Mexico, access reliable transportation. Senator Cantwell raised important points about freight rail in the Pacific Northwest, specifically along the Burlington Northern Santa Fe

(BNSF) line, and how improved infrastructure benefits cities across Washington State.

The larger takeaway is that there are practical, bipartisan solutions to the challenges facing U.S. rail transportation. This committee is in a strong position to drive meaningful legislation forward. These leaders are essential to ensuring that transportation in America is safe, reliable, and equitable— and that progress can be achieved through cooperation across party lines.

Field Notes

SEPTA Board Approves "Doomsday" Budget

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

The Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) Board of Directors announced yesterday it will move forward with deep service reductions and substantial fare increases for passengers as the agency confronts a \$213 million budget shortfall that goes into effect July 1, 2025. SEPTA officials say they have exhausted available austerity measures and, unless a legislative fix is passed by the state legislature, must now accommodate the realities imposed by the looming fiscal cliff.

The regional transit agency has already identified dozens of cost-saving actions—including a hiring freeze and administrative expense reductions—to narrow its projected deficit from \$240 million to \$213 million. However, SEPTA officials say the absence of a long-term funding solution from Pennsylvania lawmakers has left the agency with few remaining options.

"This budget will effectively dismantle SEPTA," SEPTA General Manager Scott Sauer said during a Thursday board meeting. "Once this dismantlement begins, it will be almost impossible to reverse, and the economic and social impacts will be immediate and long-lasting for all Pennsylvanians, whether they ride SEPTA or not.

SEPTA would introduce the changes in two phases, with phase one hitting August 2024 and phase two in January 2026. In total, fares would rise by more than 20% across all services and methods of payment and, if implemented, would elevate SEPTA's fares to among the highest in the U.S. Concurrently, the agency will implement <u>sweeping service cuts</u> amounting to a 45% reduction.

According to SEPTA officials, the proposed service changes will eliminate dozens of routes and substantially degrade access to transit, particularly in underserved areas. Some residents stand to lose transit access entirely, while others may face significantly longer travel times.

Absent legislative intervention, the agency warns of far-reaching consequences of regional and state economies. An analysis commissioned by SEPTA projects a \$19.9 billion decline in regional household property values, 76,700 job losses, and \$6 billion in lost potential earnings. The commonwealth would lose \$11.4 billion in tax revenue collections, including a \$674 million annual tax revenue loss to the region and Pennsylvania.

[CLICK HERE TO CONTINUE READING]

[PA RESIDENTS - CLICK HERE TO TAKE PART IN OUR ACTION ALERT]

Arizona Wins OK For Corridor ID Phase Two

By Jim Mathews / President & CEO

Whether you joined us for our Fall *RailNation: Tucson* event last year or you're a full-fledged Arizonan, you know all about <u>Arizona DOT's long-planned rail route between Phoenix and Tucson</u>.

Thanks to the Federal Railroad Administration's announcement this week that the project has cleared the first phase of the multi-stage Corridor Identification Program, that route is one step closer to reality.

In December of 2023, Arizona successfully competed for a Phase I Corridor ID grant to develop a preliminary outline of what the service could look like. This week, FRA signed off on that plan and opened the gate to enter Phase II – the development of a formal Service Development Plan, which comes with \$10 million in Federal development funding.

"We see passenger rail connecting the Phoenix and Tucson areas as an important addition to transportation options for Arizona," said ADOT Director Jennifer Toth in <u>a prepared statement</u>. "It holds the promise of more economic growth and employment while enhancing mobility for rural areas and families in communities between Phoenix and Tucson."

Although this is all early-stage work, it's also crucial because getting it wrong at this stage can doom a project. We know that rail serves communities and builds prosperity, but that happens best when the service offered is frequent, affordable, and efficient.

The Service Development Plan is where real detailed effort begins, with engineers and planners using analyses of travel data and access to jobs, schools, airports, to work out how many stations there should be, where they should be built. They'll also assess infrastructure needs and capital investment costs, forecast ridership, design a preliminary timetable, and outline a schedule for service to begin.

Action Alert: Save The Flyer



Please email <u>Joe Aiello</u> 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 <u>Twitter</u> & <u>Facebook</u> to read breaking news and join the conversation!

Amtrak train evacuated after getting stuck in Baltimore tunnel with no AC, FOX 5 DC

Coverage of the unfortunate extreme heat-related news from earlier this week in Baltimore.

Mayor Friday Ellis heads to Washington DC to gain support for I-20 Amtrak development, KNOE

A big part of our fall 2023 meeting in Meridian, Monroe (LA) Mayor Friday Ellis was on the Hill this week to drum up more support for the proposed passenger rail route between Meridian and Dallas along the I-20 corridor.

New York MTA to order more than 300 commuter railcar, Trains

The MTA is investing in the future of transit with a \$2.3B order for 316 new M-9A electric railcars for the Long Island Rail Road and Metro-North. Governor Hochul says this move will help maintain record on-time performance and improve the daily commute for thousands.

[VIDEO] Rail advocates fear Del Mar project could lock in slower, more polluting trains to LA, KPBS

Solid piece from San Diego public TV about moving the tracks away from the Del Mar bluffs and the potential of LOSSAN electrification - covering the history of the service through interviews and explaining why this issue is so important.

High Speed Rail Alliance: Illinois transit overhaul could be a gamechanger, Streetsblog Chicago

This is the first time a Midwestern state has embedded intercity rail into its core transportation strategy. If passed by the Illinois House, it could unlock new routes and modern service connecting cities across the state and the region.

Virginia approves six-year, \$7 billion transportation plan, Trains

Sadly, we are used to hearing stories of cities/states cutting funding and service these days - but not in the Commonwealth of Virginia. This investment will reshape how Virginians move: connecting communities, boosting sustainability, and modernizing infrastructure through 2031.

Amtrak Pacific Surfliner unveils special wrap for Disneyland's 70th anniversary, FOX 5 San Diego

Amtrak's Pacific Surfliner just got a Disney makeover in celebration of Disneyland's 70th anniversary. Riders can enjoy discounted park admission, 20% off train tickets, and a free shuttle from Anaheim Station to the park!

South Dakota passenger rail advocates launch "Train Trek" presentations, Dakota News Now

All Aboard NW hit the road this week for 5 "Train Trek" presentations in South Dakota! Learn about the FRA's Long Distance Service Study and its impact on Mount Rushmore State.

Northwest Arkansas Planning Commission aims to explore transit options for the growing region, 5 News Online

With the NW Arkansas area expected to surpass 1 million residents by 2050, the Regional Planning Commission is looking for input for building a "smarter, more connected future". They are conducting a Transit Alternatives Study to explore new options like light rail, bus rapid transit, and more.

NJ Transit holds groundbreaking for new Raritan River lift bridge, Trains

NJ Transit has officially begun construction on the new Raritan River Lift Bridge, replacing a 117-year-old swing bridge damaged by Hurricane Sandy. Governor Phil Murphy and NJ Transit leaders celebrated this milestone, calling it a major step toward a stronger, faster, and more connected transit system.



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

Fall Meeting Update!



Join Us Oct 2-5 In San Antonio!

By Rail Passengers Staff

It's official! The hotel contract is now signed, so we'll be staging our RailNation: San Antonio fall conference at the beautiful and newly renovated Holiday Inn San Antonio Riverwalk from October 2nd through October 5th. Our contacts at the hotel have prepared an online booking link just for our attendees, to make sure you get our special rate. That booking link is live, so please use that link to make your reservations.

This is the link to use: **Rail Passenger Association**. Booking using this link does two things: it locks in the special rate for RailNation attendees, and it makes sure that the Association can cover the costs of the conference. Booking off-site is always your choice, but it makes it harder for us to offer an affordable conference for everyone.

Alongside our Texas-area Council members, we're working on finalizing the speaker list in the next few weeks, but we're also planning extra informative hands-on sessions on how to work for trains where you live, work, or study, and even some fun field trips and social events.

Of course, we'll also be sure to get authoritative speakers on things like the fleet upgrades, the status of the Heartland Flyer and Sunset Limited, and the outlook for Federal and state funding.

As always, this is a meeting open to the general public. It is **NOT** only for Council members, and it is **NOT** only for Rail Passengers Association members. It is for anyone who wants to see more and better trains and public transportation to more places for more people. If you're reading this...**THAT MEANS YOU!**

Please keep checking <u>railpassengers.org/RNSAS</u> for all the latest info. We'll put it there first, and you can save yourself having to email us for an answer!

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, spent considerable time working to flesh out the Association's proposals for a National Passenger Rail Equipment Leasing Pool, as well as preparing for the regular RPA Board meeting and attending to routine Association business.
- Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy, tracked the House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure hearing on rail technology, continued to work with other stakeholders on surface transportation proposals, spoke with reporters about several state-specific projects, and continued to work with our Texas partners on how to <u>save the</u> <u>Heartland Flyer</u>.
- Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff, worked with our accounting team to close April and May financials, processed membership dues and donations sent to the DC office, created fundraising solicitations, talked with business partners about how we can work together, and tended to the administrative/operational needs of the Association. She also collaborated with the Interns as they tackle their summer projects.
- Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing, staffed the monthly Board meeting this week and continues to work on a number of fronts for our fall meeting coming up this October in San Antonio.
- Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant, continues to provide support to our members with login and password assistance, navigating the user portal, and processing new memberships, renewals, and donations. Please note that the *Membership Benefits* link in the User Portal is currently undergoing updates and is expected to be in service by next week.

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: <u>https://membership.railpassengers.org/usercenter</u>.

?? 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 <u>email</u> <u>Kimberly A. Notarianni</u>

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:

Welcome To Your Membership Dashboard



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!





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.



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?



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 <u>contact us</u> 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 | |
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| Yes, I prefer communication by email rather than by mail. | |
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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 Chartiable, Daffy, etc.

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| | Names & logos are shown to identify your provider & c not indicate endorsement or sponsorship. | lo |

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 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 4star rating from Charity Navigator, America's largest independent charity evaluator. Our Charity Navigator profile can be found by clicking <u>here</u>.

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:

FICOMERA ALSTOM ATRA Talgo (Cervello



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