



FRIDAY HOTLINE

#1438

MAY 8<sup>TH</sup>, 2026



## Association News

### New Long-Distance Spec: Better Cars Yes, But How About Soul?

by Jim Mathews / President & CEO

Some clever person used a [FOIA request](#)\* to obtain a 1.5 gigabyte copy of Amtrak's [request-for-proposals to U.S. carbuilders for a single-level fleet to replace the bi-level Superliner long-distance fleet](#). I had a chance yesterday to spend some "quality time" with it, along with its accompanying design visuals, and I'm happy to report I'm seeing an encouraging and coherent philosophy emerging from the package.

It's thoughtful, serious, and grounded in hard-earned lessons. It addresses the problems riders actually experience today and that I hear about all the time in emails and on social media...the kind of thing [I testified about before Congress a few years ago](#) to then-CEO Richard Anderson's ire. Equipment that breaks, interiors that wear poorly, food service that's inconsistent, and seats that don't hold up over long trips, are all addressed here.

Equipment that breaks, interiors that wear poorly, food service that's inconsistent, and seats that don't hold up over long trips, are all addressed here.

It is, in many ways, exactly the document you would want if your goal were to make long-distance service reliable, maintainable, and humane at a baseline level. And certainly that's something I've gone to Congress and called for over and over again.

But the package also reveals something else. For all its strengths, it still struggles to define what makes a long-distance train *special*. I wrote about that a couple of weeks ago, and [I'd encourage you to go back and re-read it](#).

The opening chapter, a general plan, reads less like a vision document and more like a corrective one. It's a governance framework designed to impose discipline on a process that has historically lacked that discipline. Reliability, availability, and maintainability are the organizing principles instead of the afterthoughts. Integration is treated as a first-class risk. Interfaces are controlled, documented, validated. Lifecycle costs are foregrounded, not deferred. This is Amtrak saying, plainly, that they aren't going to let this fleet buy go sideways.

Let's get it straight: **I'm all for that.**

[Click Here To Read More](#)

### UP-NS Refiles Merger Plan, But Sidesteps Future Service

by Jim Mathews / President & CEO

Union Pacific Railroad and Norfolk Southern Railway [refiled their proposed merger application](#) with the Surface Transportation Board Thursday after the Board [rejected their earlier submission](#) this winter as incomplete. As expected, the new filing includes more documentation, more route-by-route explanation, and more detail about some of the things the STB flagged last time about market share estimation and the like.

But how the combined railroad says it would accommodate passenger trains? Very little has changed.

Our early impression is that this is largely a more detailed version of the same argument the railroads made the first time around: they say, with very little evidence, that the merger won't harm passenger service because they'll still be able to meet their existing obligations to Amtrak and commuter agencies. That very narrow claim treats passenger rail as something that exists today and just needs to keep running as-is, rather than something the country is actively working to expand.

That's pretty important, because the railroads justify the merger itself on the basis of future freight growth. If freight is expected to grow across the network, then it's reasonable to ask how that same network will support the next generation of passenger service, too.

You might remember that last year I criticized the UP-NS application as basically [preserving the rail status quo](#) with no real acknowledgement of the future...even though at least 49 percent of the future of U.S. passenger rail (if you accept the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor ID projects list as a proxy) would sit inside the newly merged behemoth. Nothing in the new filing so far changes my mind on that score.

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## Amtrak Charts Progress; FRA Readies Final Rounds of IJJA Funds

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

Amtrak's Fiscal Year 2027 General and Legislative Annual Report was released one week after the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) opened applications for \$8 billion in grant opportunities for rail—a convergence that underscores the investment cliff confronting the U.S. passenger rail industry with the expiration of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IJJA) at the end of this September.

[Amtrak's FY27 General and Legislative Annual Report](#) highlights strong recent financial performance, noting that FY25 was one of Amtrak's strongest revenue years on record, with adjusted operating earnings improving 14% yearoveryear and continued improvement on the company's operating ratio.

**Fig. 1.2: Amtrak's Cost Recovery Ratio Over Time**

Service Line	FY 19 (Actual)	FY 20 (Actual)	FY 21 (Actual)	FY 22 (Actual)	FY 23 (Actual)	FY 24 (Actual)	FY 25 (Actual)	FY 26 (Plan)	FY 27 (Target)
NEC	170%	100%	52%	100%	118%	123%	129%	135%	146%
State-Supported	93%	90%	85%	79%	77%	77%	80%	80%	82%
Long-Distance	53%	34%	41%	49%	50%	50%	52%	56%	56%
<b>Companywide</b>	<b>99% ▲</b>	<b>74% ▼</b>	<b>65% ▼</b>	<b>76% ▲</b>	<b>81% ▲</b>	<b>84% ▲</b>	<b>87% ▲</b>	<b>90% ▲</b>	<b>93% ▲</b>

"Cost recovery ratio" is share of operating expense covered by operating revenue. Note that companywide totals also take into account costs and revenues associated with non-operating service lines (not shown). FY 27 figure reflects FY 27 five-year plan.

**Fig. 1.3: FY 25 Adjusted Operating Earnings by Service Line (\$millions)**

Service Line	Adjusted Operating Earnings / (Loss)	Year-Over-Year Improvement / (Deterioration)	
		\$	%
Northeast Corridor Service	\$349.3	\$81.3 ▲	30% ▲
State-Supported Service	(\$231.8)	\$19.5 ▲	8% ▲
Long-Distance Service	(\$622.7)	\$12.2 ▲	2% ▲
Other (Ancillary & Infrastructure)	(\$102.6)	(\$15.7) ▼	(18%) ▼
<b>CONSOLIDATED TOTAL</b>	<b>(\$607.8)</b>	<b>\$97.4 ▲</b>	<b>14% ▲</b>

Operating service lines (NEC, State-Supported, & Long-Distance) do not perfectly align with "passenger trains" business segment.

Notable for its absence was any sort of request to Congressional appropriators for FY27 operational funding. This is an unusual move by Amtrak, which generally includes a request for federal funding support for operations and key infrastructure programs. The White House included [a 14% reduction to Amtrak's operating budget in its FY27 Presidential Budget Request. Rail Passengers is asking Congress to reject the Trump Administration's proposed cuts](#) and fund passenger rail programs at previously authorized levels.

The report goes on to detail the railroad's ongoing capital needs as the company continues modernizing its national network. Amtrak emphasized its expanding capital portfolio, including major fleet procurements (NextGen Acela, Airo, and longdistance equipment) and largescale infrastructure projects on the Northeast Corridor (NEC) and beyond.

[Click Here To Read More](#)

## The TSA Line at Sanderson Will Be Brutal

by Jim Mathews / President & CEO

I want to say that one immediate reaction to the [recent discussion](#) around train security is sort of understandable, I guess: if someone dangerous boarded an Amtrak train carrying weapons, why not simply screen passengers the way airports do?

**But the answer is resoundingly simple: because passenger rail isn't aviation.**

And trying to turn it into aviation would likely damage many of the very things that make rail transportation work in the first place.

Let me say it here, plainly: installing TSA-style screening for Amtrak trains is just sheer boobery. It's a bad answer. And it's the wrong answer.

Some of the more breathless commentators out there seem to imagine Amtrak as a system of giant terminals: Washington Union Station, Penn Station, LA Union Station, complete with controlled access points, security perimeters, and room for TSA checkpoints.


Reality? Amtrak serves more than 500 destinations across the country. Roughly 380 of those stations are entirely unstaffed. Some are little more than small platforms or modest shelters alongside the tracks. Rail passengers know them affectionately as "Amshacks," though in some cases even "shack" may be generous.

Ever been to Sanderson, Texas? Passengers board the westbound Sunset Limited from a tiny open-air shelter beside the tracks in the middle of the Chihuahuan Desert. Really? TSA screening? Can you even *imagine* what that looks like, let alone what that costs? Nobody is building a miniature TSA terminal there anytime soon.

And Sanderson is far from unique.


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## We are on Substack!



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Association**

Read and subscribe at  
[railpassengers.substack.com](https://railpassengers.substack.com)



Giving you new opportunities to interact with us. Read, comment, and chat! We are working on adding new contributors to write exclusive blogs for the site and throwing around ideas for more content (podcast, anyone?)

[Check It Out Here!](#)

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## Field Notes

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@narprrail.org](mailto:hotline@narprrail.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!*

**NOTE: The links below are a mix of stories from over the last two weeks**

### [What Does the Future of U.S. Passenger Rail Look Like?, Governing](#)

The boss sat down with Governing Magazine's Senior Staff Write Jared Brey to talk all things passenger rail - including the road leading to where we are today, the current UP/NS merger state of play, and federal funding & support.

### [This Doomsday Law Could Stop Trains Across America In A Matter of Weeks, Streetsblog](#)

With the Federal "passenger rail liability cap" expected to jump nearly 24% to \$400M (while the \$750k liability for trucking companies hasn't moved since '80) - it could be a bleak future for commuter agencies.

### [Train Travel Is An Alternative To Air Travel Chaos And High Fuel Prices, Forbes](#)

Rail Passengers President & CEO Jim Mathews features heavily in this Forbes piece on passenger rail being a more attractive choice for travelers in the light of rising airline and gas prices.

### [Amtrak cancels controversial vent for West Baltimore tunnel project, citing cost savings, The Banner](#)

While it is being announced that the project is being slimmed down to budget concerns, this is a big win for local advocates who were concerned with the "unnecessary" site.

### [Railroad Unions - Organized Labor Since the 19th Century: A Research Guide, Library of Congress](#)

On this May Day, we look back at the role unions have played in the long history of passenger rail in the United States.

### [USD 1.29 Billion contract for the new Hudson River rail tunnel, Railway Pro](#)

There were fears that the award of this contract would be delayed because the Trump Administration might stop the funding of the project again, but the longest tunnel-boring section of the entire project has been given the green light.

### [\[Video\] Amtrak suing Metro-North for allegedly blocking nonrevenue trains on Northeast Corridor, MSN](#)

A beef is brewing between Metro-North and Amtrak over the movement of non-revenue equipment

### [Sen. Dick Durbin highlights Amtrak successes during visit to Normal, 25 News](#)

Retiring Illinois Senator Dick Durbin held a press conference in Normal, IL on Monday (home of the 2nd busiest Amtrak station in the state) to highlight the benefits of passenger rail, especially when connecting students and universities.

### [Here's what proposed Amtrak budget cuts could mean for expanded Cincinnati rail service, Local 12](#)

On the heels of both AAO's Ohio Rail Summit & the official announcement of our RailNation event later this year in Toledo, Cincinnati's WKRC reports on the effects the Trump Administration's proposed budget cuts could have on the future of passenger rail

### [Rising gas prices drive St. Louisans to take the train, Fox 2](#)

Gas in the Gateway City has risen to around \$4.05/gallon and residents are looking for transportation options

[Northwest Mall being demolished to make way for Houston station of Texas High-Speed Rail line](#), Texas Rail Advocates

High-speed rail in the Lone Star State takes an important step forward in its long, twisting saga to become reality.

[Pensacola mayor says federal support needed for Amtrak service to come to city](#), WEAR News 3

The city of Pensacola, FL is ready to bring passenger rail back to the panhandle, but federal support (and more equipment) will be needed for trains to roll in for the first time since 2005

[Video] [This is Amtrak's Secret New Heritage Locomotive](#), Trains Are Awesome

A look at the "Washington Terminal Company" livery - and a what makes something a "heritage unit".



**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

### Association Events



Rail Passengers President & CEO Jim Mathews gives the official public announcement for our event coming up this October in the Glass City.

[Click Here For Our New RailNation Website](#)

### Local Meetings + Events

[22nd Annual Southwestern Rail Conference](#), May 18-19

[Greater Northwest Rail Summit](#), August 25-27

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

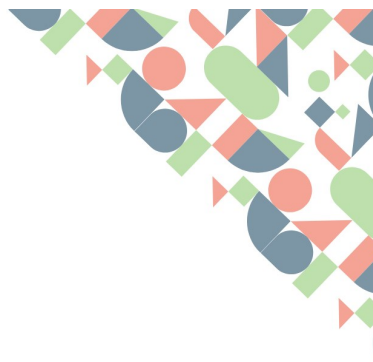
Your staff is at the table, in the field, having the conversations that make a difference for passengers across the country. Learn what they're up to each week and how you can support your Association's key missions!

- **Jim Mathews, President & CEO**, did press interviews almost every day this week, on World Cup, on UP's attempt to acquire Norfolk Southern, and on what's happening in Congress. He closed the week by heading to Denver for the ColoRail membership meeting, and preparing for next week when he will co-chair the International Rail Interiors Summit of industry thought leaders in Washington, DC.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, spent the week working with stakeholders on Capitol Hill to develop policy proposals for the upcoming Surface Transportation Reauthorization legislative push, while working with allies in Texas on preparing a campaign to support continued operations for the *Heartland Flyer*.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, continued preparing for the FY2025 audit, created fundraising solicitations, processed membership dues and donations sent to the DC office, and tended to the administrative/operational needs of the Association.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, worked with members of the Council on the election process for our Board of Directors, spent time on the draft agenda for this fall's RailNation event in Toledo, and started building out our content on the new Substack page.
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, continues to assist our members with their membership needs as well as access to their dashboard. If you need to add a sub-member to your account, require a digital copy of your membership card, or are having difficulty accessing the portal, please reach out to her at [knotarianni@narprail.org](mailto:knotarianni@narprail.org)

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## Apply for Volunteer Staff at Rail Passengers Association

**VOLUNTEERS  
NEEDED**



[railpassengers.org/volunteer](http://railpassengers.org/volunteer)

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!





 Tell Us Your Story

 Visit our Store

 Discuss This Week's Hotline

 Service Updates & Timetables

 Visit the General Membership Group

 View Webinars

 Rail Passengers' Social Media

 Take Action

## Rail Passengers Timetables



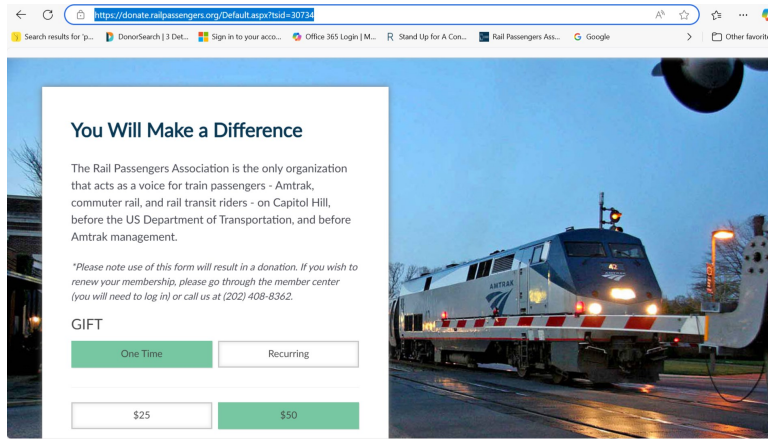
Our Timetables Manager, Chris Jukins, has created a spring update for us. He is still working on a few stragglers, but we should have those up soon.

[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!

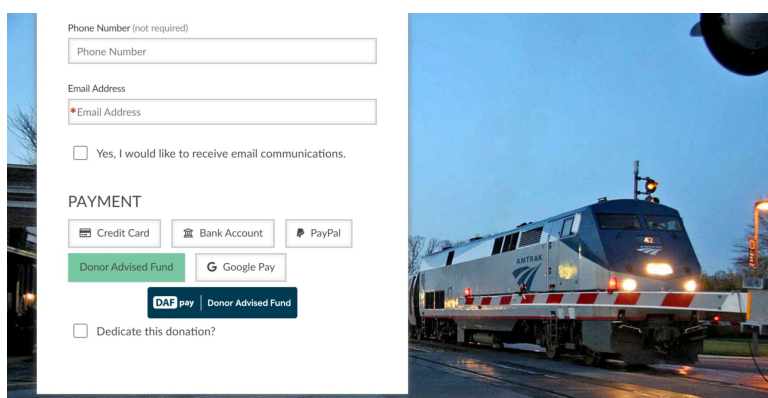
With multiple secure, protected methods of payment, you have more flexibility in the way dues are paid. Skip the hassle and [contact us](#) today for help setting up automatic or online payments.

- 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:**

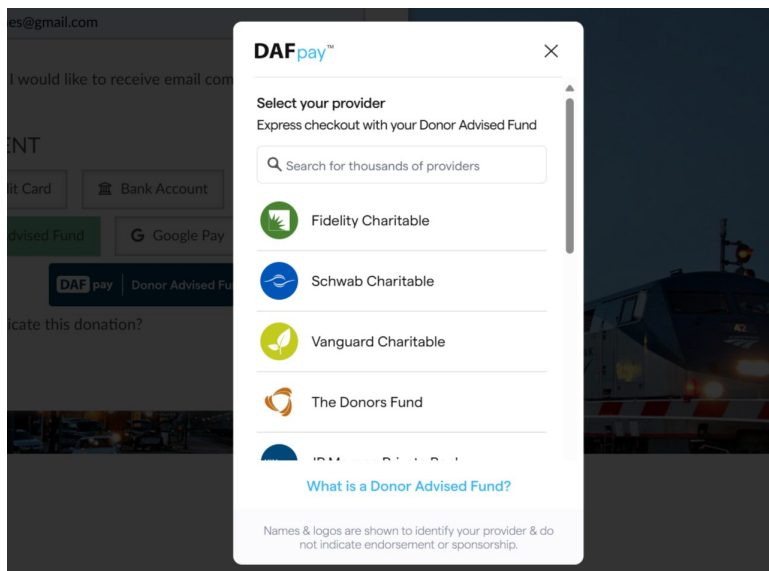


## Membership Form:

The screenshot shows a membership form with the following elements:

- Three checkboxes: "Rail Passengers' Webinar Series", "Other", and "Yes, I prefer communication by email rather than by mail."
- A "PAYMENT" section with four buttons: "Credit Card", "Bank Account", "Donor Advised Fund" (highlighted in black), and "Google Pay".
- A "CAPTCHA" section with a checkbox "I'm not a robot" and a CAPTCHA image.
- A "DAF pay | Donor Advised Fund" button at the bottom.

After selecting Donor Advised Fund as your payment preference, you will be taken to a DAFpay screen to select your donor advised fund provider, i.e., 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](mailto:jstone@narprail.org)  
Tax ID: 36-2615221

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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](#).

## THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS:



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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