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Exploring the Past, Present, and  
Future of Passenger Rail Advocacy

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**RAILNATION**  
**MERIDIAN**



*Featuring:*

Federal Railroad  
Administration

**SOUTHERN RAIL COMMISSION**

Mayors of the Region

*and*

**AMTRAK LEADERSHIP**

"THE LITTLE TOWN WITH A  
BIG DREAM HOSTS  
STAKEHOLDERS THAT CAN  
CREATE EVEN MORE  
OPPORTUNITY FOR MORE  
PASSENGERS ACROSS THE  
UNITED STATES!"

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**OCTOBER 6TH-8TH 2023**

@ The Riley Center and Threefoot Hotel

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**RAIL PASSENGERS**  
ASSOCIATION

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# Welcome to RailNation!

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Thank you for making the trek to beautiful Meridian, Mississippi. This is a small town that invested big in passenger rail. We're so glad to see how it is paying off for both locals and visitors. We hope you will take the next few days to listen, learn, ask questions, and get everything you need to stand up for rail in your Hometown. It takes real commitment to stay organized and committed to our vision of a connected America, bringing more trains to more people in more places. Together, we can achieve our goals and look towards a future with more people onboard than ever. - Jim Mathews, President & CEO

## ABOUT THE RILEY CENTER

In 1889, Israel Marks and Levi Rothenberg began building a magnificent five-story department store in the heart of Meridian, with a Grand Opera House attached. Store and theater quickly took their places at the center of community life. The Grand Opera House featured productions that originated in New York and toured the country by rail. Unfortunately, the Grand Opera House went dark in 1927 and as the department store thrived, then declined, it finally closed in 1990.

In 2000, The Riley Foundation made an anchor contribution of \$10 million, stipulating that Mississippi State University own and operate the facility. In September 2006, the MSU Riley Center for Education and Performing Arts opened. Today, the Riley Center, the Deen Building, and the Rosenbaum Building constitute the Riley Campus of MSU- Meridian, home to the university's health science programs. Once again, they stand at the center of life in Meridian - catalysts for the continuing renaissance of the city's historic heart.

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# Speakers & Presentations

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**Saturday, October 7th**

**7:00am - 8:00am** Registration/Breakfast

**8:00am - 8:10am** Welcome

Meredith Richards, Rail Passengers Chairwoman

Jim Mathews, Rail Passengers President + CEO



**8:10am - 8:50am** Keynote Speaker

Amit Bose, FRA Administrator



**8:50am - 10:20am** Mayors Panel

Carolyn McAdams, Mayor of Greenwood, MS

Friday Ellis, Mayor of Monroe, LA

Dan Gibson, Mayor of Natchez, MS



**10:20am - 10:35am** BREAK

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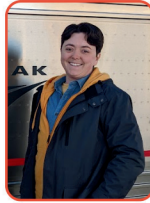
## Speakers & Presentations

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**10:35am - 11:45am** Onboard Service Improvements:

Best Practices for Enhancing the Passenger Experience

Madison Ned Butler, Rail Passengers Communications Manager



**11:45am - 1:00pm** Lunch with Peter LeCody,

President of Texas Rail Advocates,

Rail Passengers Association Past Chair



**1:00pm - 2:00pm** The Blueprint for getting new service in Your Hometown

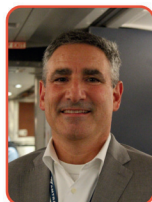
Knox Ross, Southern Rail Commission Chairman



**2:00pm - 3:00pm** New Developments at Amtrak

Larry Chestler, Vice President, Long Distance Service Line

Anna Lynn Smith, Vice President, Strategy & Planning



**3:00pm-3:15pm** BREAK

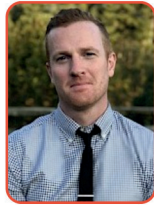
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## Speakers & Presentations

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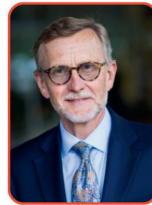
**3:15pm - 4:15pm** Finalizing Rail Passengers Association  
Route Recommendations for the FRA's  
Daily Long-Distance Service Study

Sean Jeans-Gail, Rail Passengers VP of Gov't Affairs + Policy  
Frank Loetterle, FRA Intercity Passenger Rail Planner



**4:15pm - 5:00pm** Closing "Fireside Chat"

Jim Mathews, Rail Passengers President + CEO  
John Robert Smith, Current Transportation for America  
Chairman & Former Mayor of Meridian



**5:00pm** Conference Closes

### **Sunday, October 8th**

**8:30am - 10:30am** Council Business Meeting:  
@ Meridian City Hall

(Must be a member of Association or Council to attend)

**11:30am - 1:00pm** Gospel Brunch @ Jean's  
with Live Music by My Savior Story

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# Notes & Questions:

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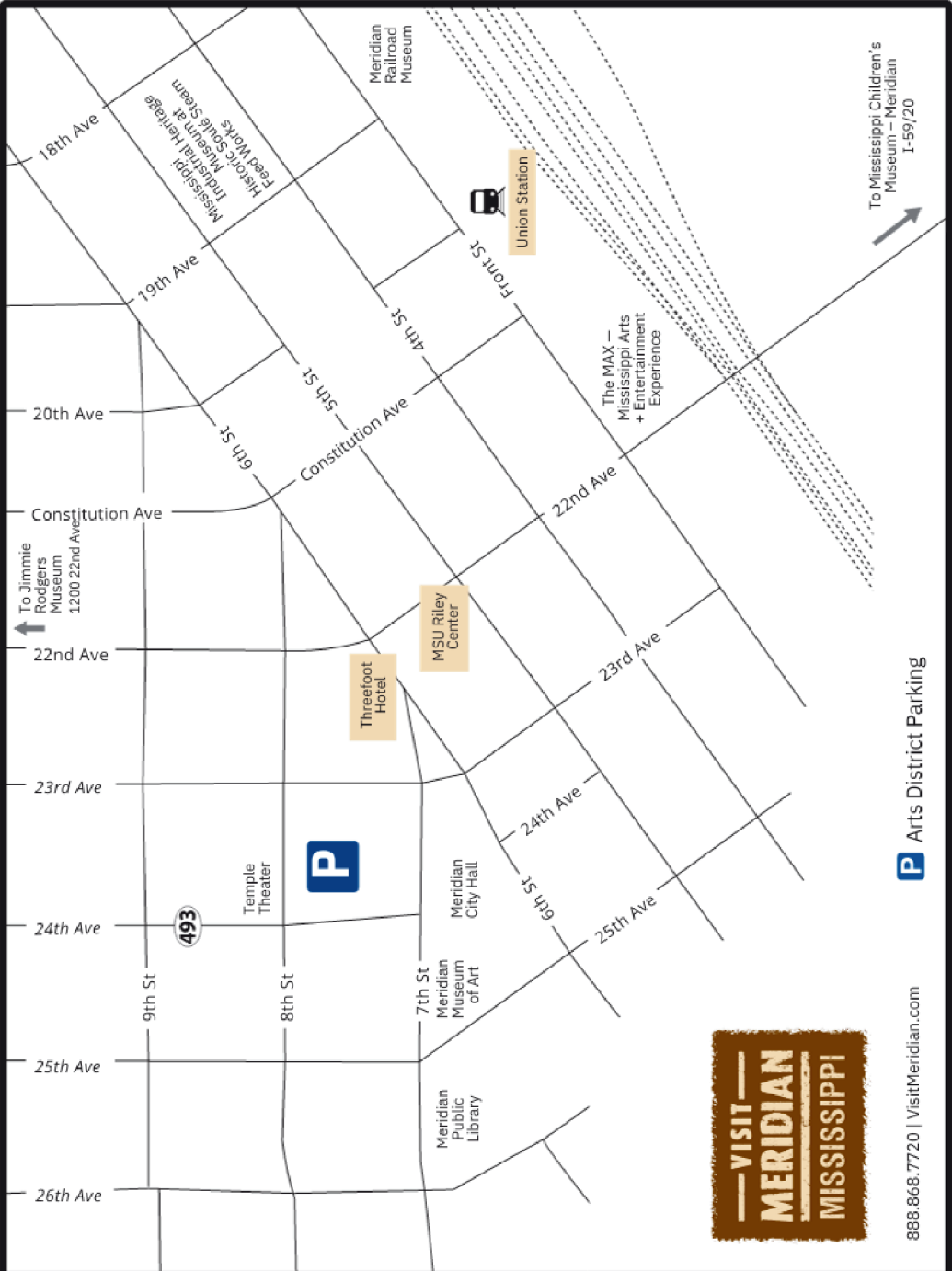
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## Notes & Questions:

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# Map & Destinations



888.868.7720 | VisitMeridian.com

**P** Arts District Parking



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# RPA Staff:

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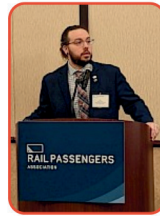
**Jim Mathews**  
President + CEO



**Sean Jeans Gail**  
Vice President of Policy  
+ Government Affairs



**Jonsie Stone**  
Chief of Staff



**Joe Aiello**  
Director of Community  
Engagement + Organizing



**Jeanne Lawrie**  
Director of Resource  
Development



**Madison Ned Butler**  
Communications  
Manager

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# RPA Board:

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## **Officers:**

Meredith Richards (VA), Chair  
Bruce Ashton (TX), Vice Chair  
Harvey Bowen (WA), Vice Chair  
Thomas Girsch (MA), Vice Chair  
Ken Joseph (PA), Vice Chair  
William C. Dunn (VA), Secretary  
Kenneth T. Clifford (OH), Treasurer

## **Directors:**

Dan Bilka (CO)  
Richard Bruss (PA)  
Kevin Buettner (OH)  
Michael Christensen (UT)  
Tom Compson (TX)  
Gary Lanman (OK)  
Andrew Lodriguss (LA)

## **Ex-officio:**

Ken Briers (DC) - Immediate Past Chair



# THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS:

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**Mississippi Power**

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FEDERAL CREDIT UNION



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Since 1988  
**WATERS**

# About Rail Passengers Association:

For over 50 years we have been advocating for the growth of public interstate passenger rail. We are guided by our firm belief that all Americans—from New York City to Yazoo City; from Seattle to Pascagoula — deserve the choice of safe, reliable, convenient, affordable, and enjoyable passenger train service.

We know that providing more routes and frequencies of modern passenger trains will give more Americans greater mobility and nurture local economies. Increased passenger rail also helps reduce energy use, pollution and land consumption associated with our current, very inefficient fly-or-drive-only transportation methods. By educating, informing and activating our base of support, Rail Passengers Association holds a key stake in utilizing grassroots advocacy.

Combined with our research efforts, and professional advocacy we provide decision makers with support for the improvement of service across the United States through effective policy development. Not only do we advocate for growth of interstate passenger rail on Capitol Hill and in state offices, we educate advocates, journalists, students, and tourists on the benefits of passenger rail by sharing stories, destinations, and future developments to inspire passengers of all ages and locations.



[@railpassengers / railpassengers.org](https://railpassengers.org)