



FRIDAY HOTLINE

#1420

DECEMBER 5TH, 2025



Tell Us Your Story

Association News

A Cold Night in Michigan

[by Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing](#)

Close your eyes and imagine this scenario: you are on a train heading to a destination to celebrate an event. It could be anything, really. While you are on this trip, the train, without warning, stops dead. The onboard staff immediately jumps to action, and alerts the passengers to the issue and asks you to hold tight. In what seems like no time at all, the conductor is on the PA announcing that buses are on the way and that they will work on the train. Everyone gets on the way to their destination with minimal delay.

Sounds good right? Sure, you are slightly inconvenienced by having to ride a bus, but you get where you need to be.

That is **NOT** what happened to a little over one hundred passengers (yours truly included) last week.

This was a failure at every level.

I take no joy in writing this blog, but it is something that absolutely can not be defended, and the details need to be shared on behalf of all on board.

Sadly, it's become the fourth piece in an "ongoing series".

(read "parts" [One](#), [Two](#), [Three](#))

In the blogs I linked above, I have written about equipment issues in the winter and about terrible communication practices - this one is the bastard child of the two.

If you haven't heard by now, there was [a bit of an issue in Michigan on Thanksgiving](#). I was on that train with my partner heading to Detroit for a quick trip to see a hockey game on Friday. I did my best to keep notes after things went haywire - so pardon if not all the details are filled in. A lot of this was written in real time from a freezing train, and I've been sick all weekend.

The trip started easy enough. Wolverine train #352 left Chicago right at 2:15 and headed east. Everything was cruising along, even ended up early at one of the stations before getting to Battle Creek. Arrived at Battle Creek for the crew change and continued on.

Three hours down. Two more to go. **That's when everything went wrong.**

[\[HEAD TO OUR WEBSITE TO READ MORE FROM JOE\]](#)

Amtrak Board Spotlights Need for More Capacity

[by Sean Jeans-Gail | VP of Gov't Affairs](#)

At Amtrak's annual public meeting in New Orleans, the message was clear: demand for train travel is surging and ridership is up, but the railroad will need to step up its equipment procurement effort to keep up with future demand.

While Amtrak leadership highlighted record ridership in fiscal year 2025, they also acknowledged a troubling reality—even with new Airo trainsets and NextGen Acela units entering service next year, overall capacity will remain below what it was just two years ago.

This is unacceptable for a country that is increasingly turning to passenger rail as a sustainable, reliable alternative to congested highways and unpredictable air travel.

Rail Passengers believes that the solution is clear: **Congress must continue to fund equipment procurement efforts for both corridor and long-distance routes in the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization.**

In the opening question during the Q&A, Rail Passengers' President & CEO Jim Mathews stated as much, asking Amtrak to be clear in communicating its needs to the public and to policymakers—something that will help passengers be better advocates for new and improved service.

Taking Stock of the New Look Board

One of the early takeaways from the meeting is that the current Amtrak Board of Directors features the strongest personnel lineup in a generation.

With the Board finally at full strength—save the vacant slot that the CEO would occupy—the public was able to witness a level of focused and spirited engagement that hasn't always been standard in the past. The current Amtrak Board features a transit CEO (Elaine Clegg), an advocate for passengers with disabilities (David Capozzi), a former chair of a state party apparatus (Robert Gleason), a mayor (Chris Koos), the former head of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) (Ron Batory), the former third-ranking administrator at the USDOT (Joel Szabat), an academic (Dr. Lanhee Chen), and a real estate financier (Chairman Anthony Coscia).

The varied professional backgrounds and geographic representation produced back-and-forths that were a much-needed complement to the PowerPoint-based delivery of facts and figures by Amtrak executives.

[\[CLICK HERE FOR MORE OF SEAN'S MEETING RECAP\]](#)

New RPA Survey: Comfort Matters, But Fares Still Rule the Rails

by Jim Mathews / President & CEO

When it comes to getting people out of their cars and onto trains, Americans are pretty clear about what they want: comfort, reliability, and a fair price. With more than a thousand responses from passengers across the country, our newest flash Rail Passenger Experience Survey in November shows that even as travelers value better seating, Wi-Fi, and onboard amenities, the cost of the ticket remains the most powerful motivator (or deterrent) of all.

Our survey shows that passengers still want that elevated experience – and many already have it – but they also want it to feel worth the fare they pay.

When we asked passengers who don't ride Amtrak today what change would make them more likely to choose Amtrak, almost half of respondents (48.7 percent) chose "Lower fares." And among commuter rail riders, nearly one in four (23.3 percent) identified "Fare price" as an important factor in their daily travel experience.

That doesn't mean people are unwilling to pay for rail travel. It means they want the experience and the cost to feel aligned. In the open-ended comments, that theme surfaced again and again: "I'd ride Amtrak more if it didn't cost so much more than driving." Passengers weren't calling for a race to the bottom. But, they were asking for value that matches the price on the ticket.

In other words, desirable amenities help, but do not fully offset fare sensitivity for most people. Just under 16 percent of those who responded to the survey said they rarely or never take trains. But for the rest of the respondents who take either Amtrak or commuter rail or both, most who value amenities like Wi-Fi, premium seating, or good food are also sensitive to fares (530), while a smaller group values only amenities (355) or only fares (76).

Affordability isn't just an Amtrak issue. Among those who regularly ride commuter or regional rail systems, fare price ranks alongside reliability, frequency, and cleanliness as one of the most important aspects of the daily journey. Even for riders who use their local system every weekday, ticket price remains part of the mental calculus – especially when monthly passes or parking costs rise faster than wages.

Our analysis found that fare sensitivity isn't confined to any one region or income bracket. Respondents across income levels mentioned cost concerns, from lower-income households stretching travel budgets to higher-income professionals questioning why short-distance rail fares sometimes exceed airfare.

[\[FOR MORE FROM JIM AND A BREAKDOWN OF THE SURVEY RESULTS, CLICK HERE\]](#)

Apply for Volunteer Staff at Rail Passengers Association

[by Jim Mathews / President & CEO](#)

I'm excited to share that our Rail Passengers Association's [new volunteer staff program](#) is live and ready for applications!

For the past few years, I've had conversations with new members or financial supporters who want to volunteer their time as well as their dues money or donations and most of them start with the assumption that the only way to volunteer is to run for, and get elected to, our Council of Representatives. Not so!

Our Council is, of course, a great way to serve and that process, too, is open right now. If you're eligible to run for a role as State Representative, the process to get on the ballot is open until December 1st. You can find out more about that [here](#).

But my message today is about the many other ways you can put your talents to work in a way that not only helps the Association but helps you, too.

This is hands-on work, where volunteers actually build the campaigns, crunch the data, and write the briefs that shape the outcomes. We have roles open in [data-entry](#), [grants and fundraising](#), [public relations and marketing](#), as well as numerous roles in [technology](#) – including a [network administrator position](#) in which we're willing to support getting Microsoft (and other) certifications. We also have several opportunities working directly in [policy](#) and [legislative affairs](#).

For a student, or an early career professional, or a mid-career person thinking of a career change, we can offer benefits that will help you even as your volunteer work helps us. Our volunteers' work gets into congressional offices, DOT briefings, and FRA dockets, in front of national, state, and local leaders, and makes a real difference in rail policy.

There are also a few director-level positions reporting to me as CEO. I'm looking to bring on a [volunteer Chief Technology Officer](#), a volunteer [Director of Marketing, PR, and Communications](#), and a volunteer on-site events producer.

In addition, I'm looking to create a new department focused on formalizing the many informal interventions we handle today with operators, like Amtrak and Brightline, on behalf of our members when they experience customer-service issues. I'd like to bring on a [volunteer Director of Consumer Affairs](#) to lead this effort and to build a department dedicated to these kinds of consumer-advocacy needs.

Yes, these positions are unpaid. But the results they produce – for you as well as for Rail Passengers – are real. You're going to make a real difference while generating work products, job references, enjoying networking opportunities, and maybe even acquiring a couple of technical certificates you can put to work right away in your "day" job. These offer portable, career-enhancing skills, plus national visibility.

I'm also planning to make it about a lot more than just work. We can make it social, with awards programs, virtual "rail happy hours," conferences where volunteers are celebrated, behind-the-scenes tours to reward extra-curious volunteers, picnics, and anything else we can think of!

I've done a lot of volunteering in my personal life, as a firefighter, paramedic, search-and-rescue airman, working in the Warbirds control tower at the annual AirVenture air show in Oshkosh, and serving on the Amtrak Customer Advisory Committee (back when it still existed). Every one of those experiences shaped me, gave me new tools and skills, and opened doors when I needed them opened.

I know we don't have the adrenaline of flying an airplane or running into a burning building — but what we DO have is influence, visibility, and clout. Our volunteers can help shape Federal transportation policy, secure grants, and improve service for millions of riders. That's meaningful work. And I really want it to be YOUR work, a career-enhancing gateway into transportation policy and advocacy, just like it was for me.

Go take a look at [the Volunteer landing page](#) and see whether there's a role you'd like to apply for. We're ready to hear from you!

Field Notes

Please email [Joe Aiello](mailto:jaiello@narprail.org) if you have any local, state or regional stories/projects 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 Joe Aiello @ jaiello@narprail.org with the subject "HOTLINE PHOTO"

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!

[Where Train Dreams Meet Reality in Texas](#), Bloomberg Citylab

Citylab's Benton Graham travels from Dallas to Houston and takes a deep dive into the Lone Star State's passenger rail history and its frustrating "you can't get there from here" present. He also talks a bit about the "patiently optimistic" future with Texas Rail Advocates President Peter LeCody.

Along the way, he spoke to his fellow travelers, including our own Texas Council Representative (and host for our recent meeting in San Antonio) Bruce Ashton.

[Amtrak restores train service to Lake Shore Limited route](#), Progressive Railroading

Suspended since July due to a 6-foot deep and near 200-foot long trackside sinkhole, Amtrak's Lake Shore Limited service between Boston and Albany/Rensselaer has now been reinstated (a month earlier than originally planned).

[Celebrating 60 Years on the Rails: Legendary Amtrak Conductor Lenny Walker Marks 80th Birthday](#), EIN Presswire

Trained opera singer, folk guitarist, and beloved conductor. "I'll retire when it stops being fun!"

[\[Video\] Christmas tree lighting held at Union Station](#), FOX 5 DC

It's officially the holiday season

[Norfolk Southern and Amtrak team up with Toys for Tots for holiday train in New York](#), Trains Pro

Amtrak and NS's "Toys For Tots" holiday train will be rolling through New York State on December 13th.

[Residents weigh in on expansion, improvements to RI train service](#), ABC6

The Rhode Island Department of Transportation held its first of three public meetings this week to gather input on potential expansion and station upgrades.

[VPRA announces service changes for Long Bridge Project construction](#), AJOT.COM

The Long Bridge Project - a key initiative under Transforming Rail in Virginia - starts full construction on January 12th and extending through 2030, and temporary service adjustments will be implemented for Amtrak, VRE, and CSX.



WE ARE WORKING ON A DISCORD SERVER.
STAY TUNED FOR MORE INFORMATION

Upcoming Events

Membership Mondays

A dark blue rectangular graphic with a subtle background pattern of train numbers. On the left, there is a red circular icon containing a white silhouette of two people at a computer. To the right of this icon, the text 'MEMBERSHIP MONDAYS' is written in large, bold, white capital letters. Further right, the dates and times 'December 8th & 15th' and '10am-2pm EST' are listed in white. Below the main title, a list of topics is provided in green text: 'Need Help With:' followed by bullet points for 'Joining?', 'Renewing?', 'Accessing the User Center?', and 'Upgrading?'. To the right of this list, the text 'Join Kimberly Notarianni & Jonsie Stone for virtual office hours' is written in orange. Below that, 'Sign up at' is in green, followed by the URL 'railpassengers.org/membermonday' in orange. At the bottom left, a line of text reads 'Have General Questions About Memberships (But NOT Trains)?' in green. At the bottom right is the Rail Passengers Association logo, which consists of a white square with a diagonal line and the text 'RAIL PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION' to its right.

MEMBERSHIP MONDAYS
December 8th & 15th
10am-2pm EST

Need Help With:

- Joining?
- Renewing?
- Accessing the User Center?
- Upgrading?

Join Kimberly Notarianni & Jonsie Stone for virtual office hours

Sign up at
railpassengers.org/membermonday

Have General Questions About Memberships (But **NOT** Trains)?

RAIL PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

Save the Date(s)!

A rectangular graphic with a light beige background. On the left is a photograph of the US Capitol building at sunset. To the right of the photo is the Rail Passengers Association logo. Below the logo, the text '2026 DC WORKSHOPS + Days on the Hill' is written in large, bold, dark blue letters. Underneath this, the dates 'April 20th - April 24th, 2026' are in red, followed by 'Rail Passengers Office' and '1200 G St NW, Suite 520' in dark blue.

RAIL PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

2026 DC WORKSHOPS
+ Days on the Hill

April 20th - April 24th, 2026
Rail Passengers Office
1200 G St NW, Suite 520

Registration and council business meeting information to follow.

Note: Attendees will be responsible for securing their own lodging needs.

A map of the United States with colored callouts for different regions. The callouts are: 'Southwest, Northwest, Mountain & Plains April 23 & 24' (dark blue), 'Mid-Atlantic + Midwest April 21 & 23' (dark blue), 'Northeast + South April 20 & 21' (dark blue), and 'Council Business Meeting April 22' (red). A legend at the bottom right states: 'Each Group: Day 1 - In Office Workshop, Day 2 - On the Hill Meetings'. The background of the map is a light beige with a faint image of the US Capitol.

2026 DC WORKSHOPS + DAYS ON THE HILL

Southwest, Northwest, Mountain & Plains
April 23 & 24

Mid-Atlantic + Midwest
April 21 & 23

Northeast + South
April 20 & 21

Council Business Meeting
April 22

Each Group:
Day 1 - In Office Workshop
Day 2 - On the Hill Meetings

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**, had a busy week, meeting with two potential corporate supporters on Tuesday, kicking off the planning on

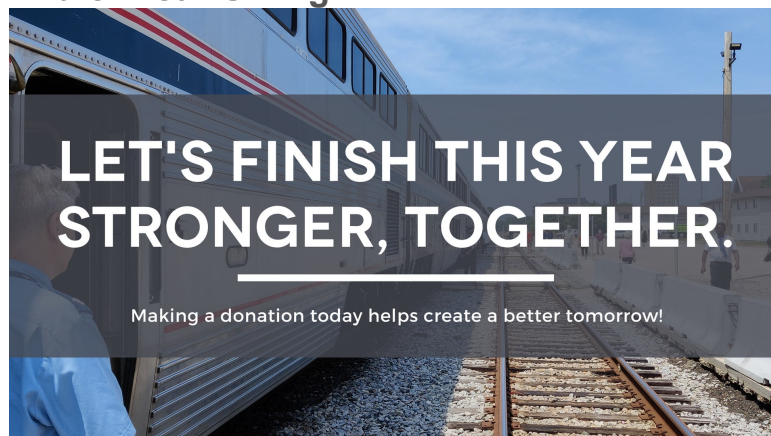
Wednesday for our Fall RailNation event in Toledo, and sitting down with our coalition partners later in the week tracking and responding to developments in Union Pacific's proposed acquisition of Norfolk Southern. Oh and in-between he went to New Orleans to participate in Amtrak's Board meeting...

- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, helped monitor Amtrak's public meeting of its Board of Directors, discussed equipment proposals for the upcoming Surface Transportation Reauthorization with key U.S. railcar manufacturers, and continued to coordinate with shippers and other stakeholders on analysing the potential impact to passengers of a proposed merger between Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, processed membership dues and donations sent to the DC office, managed our GivingTuesday campaign, prepared end of year fundraising messages, and tended to the administrative/operational needs of the Association.

Thank you to everyone who donated to our GivingTuesday campaign. Together we raised \$16,490.14. Your generosity makes our mission possible.

- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, assisted Jonsie on materials for Giving Tuesday, edited an end of year video, got a jump on the 2026 fall meeting planning, and spoke to a number of potential incoming council representatives.
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, continues to support our community by assisting members with renewing their memberships, setting up new accounts, recovering passwords, and adding additional sub-members to existing profiles. With the offices closed over the long holiday weekend, she is also working through emails and voice messages that came in during that time. If anyone needs help navigating their account or updating their information, please don't hesitate to reach out, she is always happy to help ensure everyone stays connected and up to date.

End of Year Giving



The Rail Passengers Association would be honored if you choose to include us in your End of Year giving plans. If a check is your preferred method of distributing financial support, we encourage you to [download the attached mail-in donation form](#) and mail it to the DC Office.

Mail to:

Rail Passengers Association
1200 G Street, NW, Suite 520
Washington, DC 20005
ATTN: End of Year

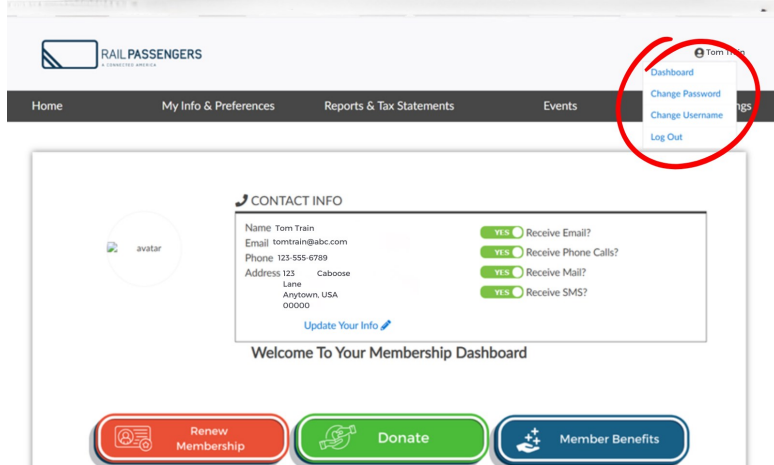
Your partnership allows us to work for you, your fellow passengers and communities across the country. Thank you for your support!

CharityEngine User Center Update

We are excited to announce functionality enhancements now available in the User Center.

You can now change your Username when inside the self-service portal.

After logging into your account, your name appears in the upper right corner, Tom Train in the screenshot. Click on your name and navigation options including "Change Username" appears. Remember to save any changes you make



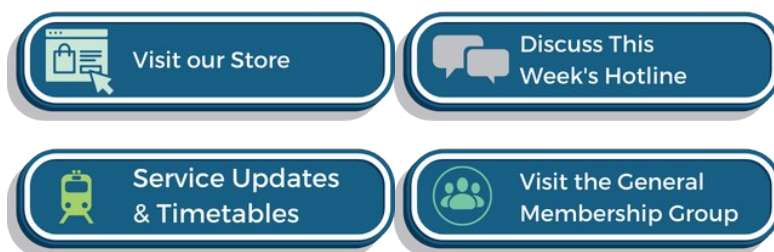
Also, your membership Type and Number displays under Accounts as shown in the below screenshot

ACCOUNTS SHOW Active ▾

Type	Amount	Next Payment	This Year	Actions
Individual (1234567)	\$61.49	3/3/26	-	

We Have Merch!

New items available!





View Webinars



Rail Passengers' Social Media



Take Action

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.

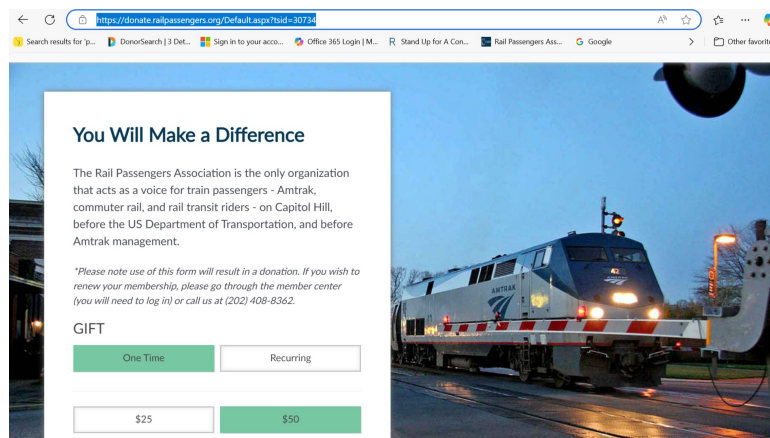
CLICK HERE

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

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!

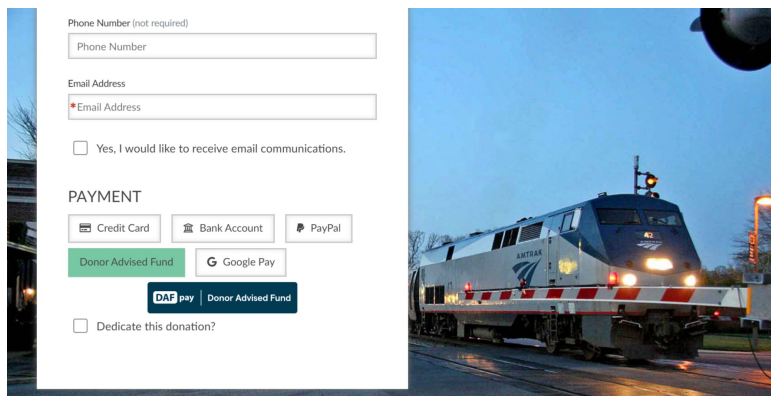
With multiple secure, protected methods of payment, you have more flexibility in the way dues are paid. Skip the hassle and [contact us](#) today for help setting up automatic or online payments.

- 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

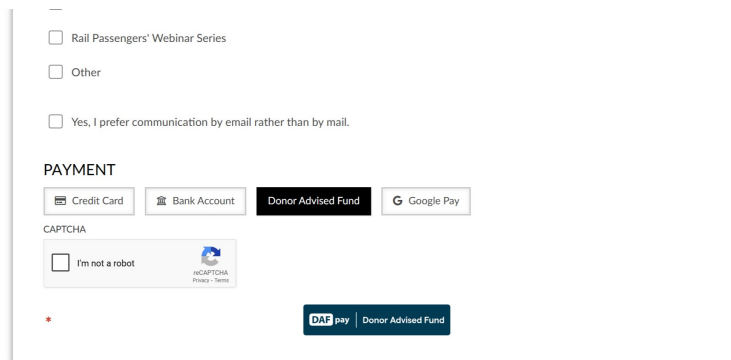
You can now donate or join/renew your membership, online, through your donor advised fund using DAFpay. All Rail Passengers forms now include a "Donor Advised Fund" button under Payment.

Donation Form:



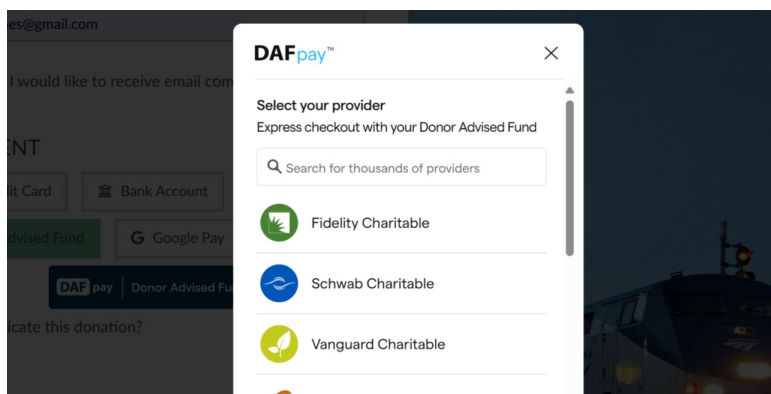
The screenshot shows a donation form on the left and a photograph of an Amtrak train at night on the right. The form includes fields for Phone Number (not required) and Email Address. Below these is a checkbox for receiving email communications. The PAYMENT section offers options for Credit Card, Bank Account, PayPal, Donor Advised Fund, and Google Pay. A 'DAF pay' button is visible under the Donor Advised Fund option, along with a checkbox to dedicate the donation.

Membership Form:

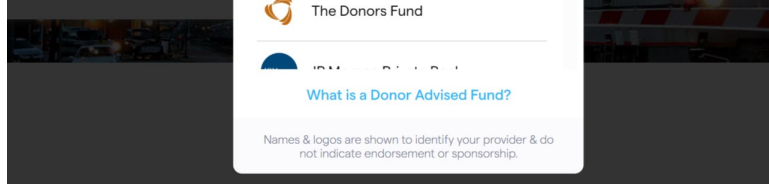


The screenshot shows a membership form. It includes checkboxes for 'Rail Passengers' Webinar Series', 'Other', and a preference for email communication. The PAYMENT section offers options for Credit Card, Bank Account, Donor Advised Fund, and Google Pay. Below this is a CAPTCHA section with a checkbox for 'I'm not a robot' and a CAPTCHA image. A 'DAF pay' button is visible under the Donor Advised Fund option.

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.



The screenshot shows the DAFpay screen with a search bar and a list of providers: Fidelity Charitable, Schwab Charitable, and Vanguard Charitable. The background shows a train at night.



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.



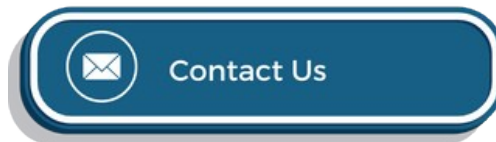
Rail Passengers Association members have access to a full service, nationwide federal credit union with extensive product and service offerings. Signature FCU is the exclusive provider of the [Rail Passengers Association-branded Visa credit card](#) with our logo, which supports our work by giving back 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 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.



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