



FRIDAY HOTLINE

#1419

NOVEMBER 21ST, 2025



Tell Us Your Story

NOTE: Our office will be closed starting at Noon Eastern on Wednesday, November 26th for the Thanksgiving holiday. We will reopen on Monday, December 1st.

There will be no Hotline next week.

Association News

Holiday Travel Alert

Thanks to doubledigit growth in early bookings and record-setting passenger numbers so far this year, Amtrak is urging early booking for the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday. Seats are filling fast.

For more - [CLICK HERE](#)

Amtrak Coach is a Bargain

by Jim Mathews / President & CEO

One early finding as our November flash passenger survey continues is that there's a lot of agita about fares. As in...A LOT. When we ask passengers who don't ride Amtrak today what change would make them more likely to choose Amtrak, so far almost half of respondents (48.7%) are choosing "Lower fares."

As anyone who has tried to book a walk-up ticket on Amtrak on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, it can be an expensive proposition. The Northeast Corridor is always pretty pricey, Acela fares are even more pricey, and outside the NEC sleeper fares are – [in my view, anyway](#) – completely disconnected from the actual value being supplied.

But Amtrak coach? I think that's one of the biggest bargains anywhere in the United States. And with a couple of notable exceptions, it's even comparable to the European services whose fares are often held up as more affordable than Amtrak.

Even though the survey is still happening ([and you can participate by clicking here](#)) this finding about fares popped out enough that I felt compelled to do a little digging to understand more. Here's what I found.

On a passenger-mile basis, Amtrak coach is often cheaper than flying, and competitive with European rail **once you compare like with like**. For example, German Deutsche Bahn saver fares can get really cheap per mile if you buy early and hit the low buckets (especially Berlin–Hamburg and Munich–Berlin). But that's exactly the same dynamic as "Flexible" on Amtrak — you're not comparing full-fare Flexpreis to full-fare Amtrak here; you're comparing promo bucket to promo bucket.

I looked at the 159-mile run between Berlin and Hamburg last week. At \$1.16 to the Euro, that worked out to \$8.50 one-way in second class, roughly the equivalent to Coach. That's a huge undercut to what Amtrak can offer. To score that kind of fare on Amtrak, you'd have to look at equivalent

low-fare promo buckets – think Night Owl fares, or midweek off-peak.

Amtrak's new Mardi Gras between New Orleans and Mobile can be had for as little as 10 cents per mile, if you can get the \$15 one-way fare. A lot of people report not getting that fare, but in some cases that's because they're trying to buy on the same day, and on a weekend when the New Orleans Saints football team is playing at home. The Borealis works out to about 12 cents per mile between Minneapolis/St. Paul and Chicago, with a \$41 fare for a 347-mile ride.

[\[CLICK HERE TO CONTINUE READING JIM'S THOUGHTS\]](#)

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

Council Elections



Every other year, we give interested Rail Passengers members the opportunity to take their support for more and better passenger trains to the next level by taking part in our national volunteer advisory body, the Council of Representatives. [We are now accepting candidates wishing to be elected to the Council as State Representatives](#) for the two-year term ending February 29, 2028.

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFORMATION](#)

The submission deadline for candidates to appear on the January 2026 election ballot is Monday, December 1, 2025, at 11:59 PM Eastern time.

Please contact Steve Musen at musensth@cox.net if you have questions or would like to know more about our Council of Representatives.

Thanks for all you do to bring about a more connected America!

Field Notes

Please email [Joe Aiello](#) 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!

[Amtrak sets ridership record in 2025 as capacity constraints continue: Analysis](#), [Trains Pro](#)

A bit of news you might have heard by now...

[Transportation leaders celebrate completion of \\$380 million South Side rail project](#), [Chicago Sun-Times](#)

The Association was proud to have been invited to last week's ribbon cutting of the largest project opening to date for the CREATE Program's 75th Street Corridor Improvement Project. ([Check our IG reels for a video from the event](#))

[Op-Ed | MTA's commuter rail upgrades put faster, cheaper city travel on track](#), amNewYork

MTA CEO Janno Lieber writes this AMNY op-ed on the effect the opening of Grand Central Madison, numerous station upgrades, the CityTicket discount program, among others has had on the accessibility & affordability for commuter rail riders in NYC

[Montreal REM Segment 2 Launches](#), Railway Age

News from our friends to the north. Montreal's Réseau Express Métropolitain officially opened their fully automated 33 km (20.5 miles) extension with 14 new stations from downtown to Deux-Montagnes. Former Rail Passengers Intern Josh Hirschfeld was on the inaugural ride earlier this week. ([Check out his video here](#)).

[Inside the delightfully quirky world of Muni and BART super-nerds](#), SF Standard

The Bay Area has some hardcore public transit fans - and the love is mutual. Former RailNation speaker Alfred Twu is featured in this piece on the "quirky" side of fandom.

[The upcoming Oxford Amtrak station is good, but we can do better](#), The Miami Student

Charley Babb, opinion writer and Miami (OH) Univ. sophomore, asks the aged old question - what good is having a passenger rail stop if the service just isn't enough?

[SEPTA finishes inspecting Silverliner IV railcars; workers now installing thermal protection circuits & SEPTA workers vote to authorize strike, raising possibility of major transit disruptions](#), CBS Philadelphia

Two stories out of Philly this week. SEPTA has completed the federally ordered point-by-point inspection of their Silverliner IV fleet and is now installing thermal protection circuits to prevent overheating ahead of the Dec 5th deadline. While this has been going on, TWU Local 234 (bus, trolley, subway, and mechanic workers) has authorized a strike, pushing for better sick pay and a twoyear contract after being without an agreement since Nov 7 - raising the threat of shutdowns if talks falter.

[Grand Junction considers federal grant application for train depot renovation](#), KKCO News

Local officials are mulling over assisting the current owners of the 120-year-old "Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad Depot" apply for a \$4.7M FRA grant to fund renovation efforts.

[VPRA and partners break ground on series of passenger rail projects](#), Mass Transit

VPRA, Amtrak, and VRE officials broke ground on the Arlington/Alexandria fourth track and bridge rebuild - part of Virginia's Transforming Rail initiative. The project will support 13 daily Amtrak VA roundtrips & expanded VRE service.

[Four vacant Galesburg buildings across from Amtrak face wrecking ball](#), WGIL 93.7 FM

The site has been identified by city officials as the potential new home of a transportation hub.

[Plan for dedicated Metro funding wins support from key D.C. region leaders](#), FFXnow

Officials from both the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) have backed a non-binding funding and regional coordination plan.

[Brightline, Sotereon AI to launch LiDAR tech on Florida passenger trains](#), Railway Technology

Brightline is piloting AI-powered LiDAR on two of their trains using Sotereon.AI's Overwatch platform - which creates real-time "digital twins" of its Florida corridor aimed at improving rail inspection, safety, and maintenance with continuous monitoring.



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

Upcoming Events

Membership Mondays



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)!



2026 DC WORKSHOPS + Days on the Hill

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

RAIL PASSENGERS ASSOCIATION

Registration and council business meeting information to follow.

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



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

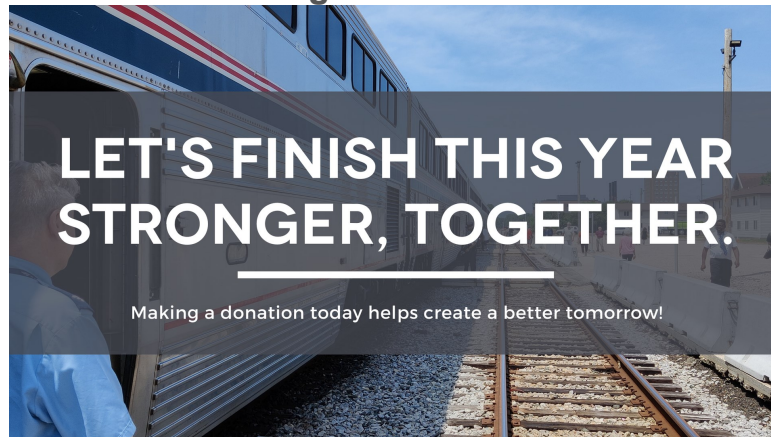
Your staff is at the table, in the field, having the conversations that make a difference for passengers across the country. Learn what they're up to each week and how you can support your Association's key missions!

- **Jim Mathews, President & CEO**, was in New York City this week to take part in the Penn Station Working Group's latest meeting – its first

since "Train Daddy" Andy Byford got handed the multiple projects. Byford addressed the Group and Jim feels very good about their direction. Jim also did a radio interview with NPR's Miami affiliate on the continuing saga of Brightline.

- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, spent the week talking with reporters about what Amtrak's record-breaking ridership and revenue means for the future of America's passenger rail and the upcoming surface transportation reauthorization. He continued to do background research on the history of rail mergers to prepare the association's position on the proposed merger between UP and NS.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, continued working on fundraising messages to be distributed in the coming weeks, processed membership dues and donations sent to the DC office and tended to the administrative and operational needs of the Association.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, created materials for our EOY campaigns, spoke to supporters from around the country, as well as editing/publishing this newsletter
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, continues to work on processing membership requests, assisting with linking or adding sub-members to membership levels who receive that benefit and is very excited that our members can now see their membership number on the dashboard of their membership profile.

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

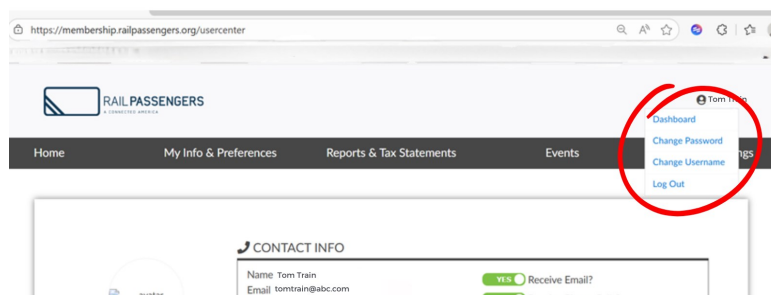
Your partnership allows us to work for you, your fellow passengers and communities across the country. Thank you for your support!

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





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.

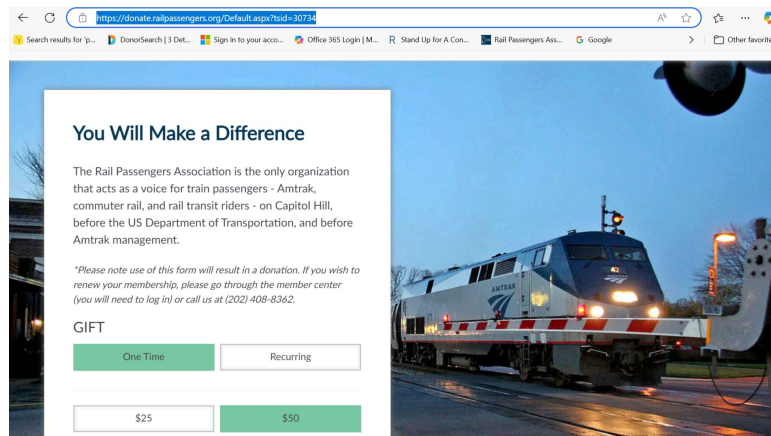
[CLICK HERE](http://railpassengers.org/timetables)

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
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!

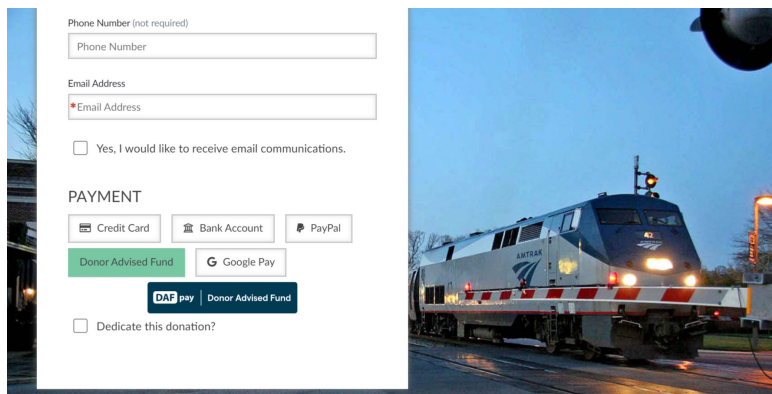
With multiple secure, protected methods of payment, you have more flexibility in the way dues are paid. Skip the hassle and [contact us](#) today for help setting up automatic or online payments.

- 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

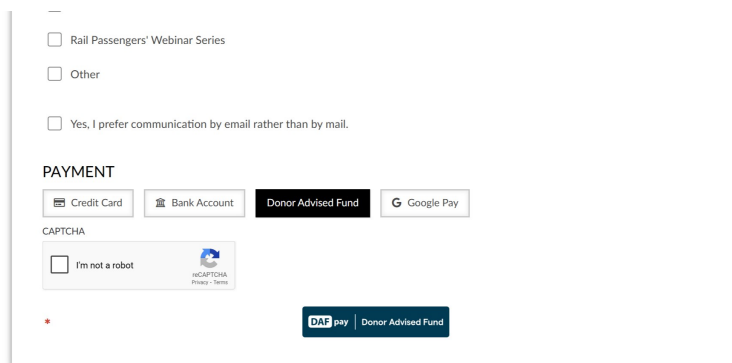
You can now donate or join/renew your membership, online, through your donor advised fund using DAFpay. All Rail Passengers forms now include a "Donor Advised Fund" button under Payment.

Donation Form:



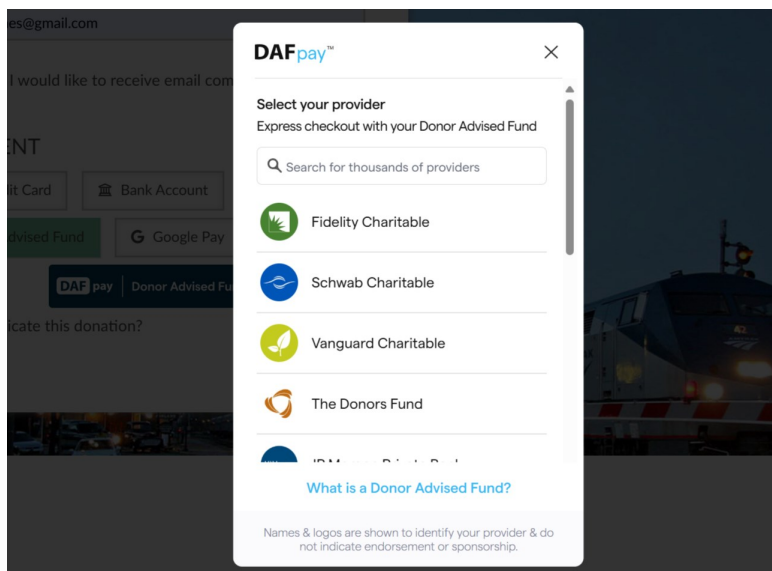
The image shows a donation form on the left and a photograph of an Amtrak train at night on the right. The form includes fields for Phone Number (not required) and Email Address. Below these is a checkbox for "Yes, I would like to receive email communications." The "PAYMENT" section offers buttons for Credit Card, Bank Account, PayPal, Donor Advised Fund (highlighted in green), and Google Pay. A "DAF pay | Donor Advised Fund" button is also present, along with a checkbox for "Dedicate this donation?".

Membership Form:



The image shows a membership form. It includes checkboxes for "Rail Passengers' Webinar Series", "Other", and "Yes, I prefer communication by email rather than by mail." The "PAYMENT" section has buttons for Credit Card, Bank Account, Donor Advised Fund (highlighted in black), and Google Pay. Below this is a CAPTCHA section with the text "I'm not a robot" and a CAPTCHA logo. A "DAF pay | Donor Advised Fund" button is at the bottom right.

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 image shows a DAFpay modal window titled "Select your provider" with the subtitle "Express checkout with your Donor Advised Fund". It features a search bar labeled "Search for thousands of providers". Below the search bar is a list of providers with their logos: Fidelity Charitable, Schwab Charitable, Vanguard Charitable, and The Donors Fund. At the bottom, there is a link "What is a Donor Advised Fund?" and a disclaimer: "Names & logos are shown to identify your provider & do not indicate endorsement or sponsorship."

Select your provider, then follow their prompts. If you need to provide

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.
-



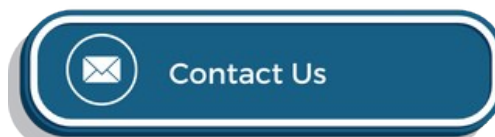
Rail Passengers Association members have access to a full service, nationwide federal credit union with extensive product and service offerings. Signature FCU is the exclusive provider of the [Rail Passengers Association-branded Visa credit card](#) with our logo, which supports our work by giving back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



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

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www.railpassengers.org