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FRIDAY HOTLINE

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JANUARY 9TH, 2026



Tell Us Your Story

Association News

Amtrak OIG Sounds Alarm Over Maintenance Strategy

by Sean Jeans-Gail | VP of Gov't Affairs & Policy

A report released by the Amtrak Office of Inspector General in the closing days of 2025 argues that Amtrak faces significant challenges in planning and managing its \$4 billion effort to upgrade its rolling stock maintenance facilities, a potential stumbling block as the railroad looks to utilize Investment in Infrastructure and Jobs Act (IIJA) funding to renew and revitalize its national fleet of equipment.

Context

Amtrak is undertaking a generational transformation of its operations through the acquisition of three major fleets—NextGen Acelas for use on the Northeast Corridor (NEC), Airos for use on State-Supported corridors and the NEC, and new long-distance trains.

To support these new trains, the company launched its National Facilities program, a \$4 billion initiative to upgrade maintenance facilities across its network. These upgrades are critical to ensuring the efficient operation and maintenance of the new equipment, reducing trip times, and increasing service frequencies. However, [an audit by the Amtrak Office of Inspector General \(OIG\) found significant challenges in planning and managing this effort](#), which could hinder Amtrak's ability to fully deploy its new trains and capture projected revenue.

Key Findings

Delayed Facility Readiness: Amtrak has begun upgrading its maintenance facilities, but the OIG found that progress has been delayed due to planning and management shortcomings. Some facilities will not be ready when new trains enter service, forcing Amtrak to store equipment intermittently and potentially delaying revenue generation. For example, while NextGen Acela entered revenue service in August 2025 and Airo is scheduled to launch 2026, several major facilities will not be substantially complete until 2029–2031, creating a misalignment between fleet deployment and maintenance capacity. (It's worth noting that the Next Gen Acelas were originally scheduled to enter revenue service in 2022.)

Incomplete Strategic Planning: The OIG audit argues that Amtrak's facility planning has lagged behind fleet planning by approximately 15 years, despite their interdependence. Although Amtrak finalized a Strategic Fleet and Facilities Plan in November 2025, it still lacks critical elements such as:

- A complete inventory of facility projects.
- A timeline with milestones.
- A methodology for prioritizing upgrades and evaluating trade-offs.

This gap limits Amtrak's ability to make informed decisions about long-term facility needs. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) raised similar concerns in 2024, urging Amtrak to adopt holistic planning processes to avoid repeating past mistakes.

- **Risk Management:** No centralized risk register or process exists to identify and mitigate common risks across projects, such as site access constraints and underground conditions.
- **Schedule Management:** Amtrak lacks an integrated master schedule, relying instead on a high-level milestone tracker that omits critical elements like digital technology upgrades.
- **Resource Management:** There is no plan to allocate personnel resources across projects, limiting visibility into workforce challenges and increasing the risk of delays.

These shortcomings have led to fragmented oversight and inconsistent standards across facilities, such as variations in equipment and platform configurations.

[\[FOR MORE ON IMPACTS & RECOMMENDATIONS, CLICK HERE\]](#)

Rail Passengers Welcomes Its First New Volunteer Class

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

Your Association's new volunteer staff program is going like gangbusters, and we're excited this week to welcome our first cohort of 16 volunteers to the team!

With the five-year policy law around Amtrak and rail expiring this year, the potential for an unprecedented merger of two freight-rail giants that would affect more than half of Amtrak's ridership, funding disputes that could lead to another government shutdown, and of course a looming election, our work this year will take on much more urgency.

That's why we're so glad to have these dedicated members come aboard and help us in what will be a very challenging, but very exciting, 2026!

In the coming days, you'll get to meet this incredible group of members, but I'd like to say right now that we were extraordinarily lucky to have such a strong and qualified group of candidates to choose from. There are so many wonderful people joining the team, that I can't go through all of them here in this post. Watch the website and our blogs for more on some of these great new additions to the Association Staff!

However, we're especially pleased to report that we've filled two key leadership roles: Chief Technology Officer and Director of Consumer Affairs.

Our incoming volunteer CTO Eric Langer is a long-time member of our Association and currently works as a program manager in automation and software development. A leader in technology and operations, Eric brings more than two decades of business and management experience to this role, a strong record of accomplishment across many businesses and clients, and a host of certifications, including Project Management Professional (PMP) and Microsoft certifications in Azure, Microsoft 365, and system administrator credentials.

One of Eric's first tasks will be to help pull together our other four technology volunteers to help us address some big challenges we're facing right now in our Office 365 cloud, our website handling, and re-assessing our technology stack.

Meanwhile, the new volunteer Director of Consumer Affairs is no stranger to customer-care and call center operations -- Bill Sievers, who is joining our team from Florida, began his career at Amtrak in the Philadelphia Call Center! Bill spent 16 years at Amtrak rising through increasingly responsible positions, and when he left Amtrak he headed what was then Amtrak's largest call center in Fort Washington, Penn. Paul Allen, Microsoft's billionaire co-founder, recruited Bill to consolidate call center operations for 13 cable companies that Allen had acquired, which eventually became Charter (Spectrum).

Bill will have a strong team of three other extremely well-qualified volunteers as we build this brand-new Consumer Affairs capability within the Association, including an exceptional Deputy Director in Larry Gould, a long-time member who brings decades of transportation and transit-planning experience at New York's MTA and Nelson/Nygaard Consulting, along with stellar volunteer service on the Board of the Congress for the New Urbanism.

Bill, Larry, and their colleagues will establish and manage a program to handle passenger complaints involving rail operators, whether Amtrak or private, truly fulfilling Rail Passengers' role as the national "Voice of the Passenger." Everything from cleanliness and facilities to on-time performance and food and beverage and fares will be on the table. But it's not just complaints. Crucially, we'll also use this function as a way to make sure that customer kudos for those great crews get the focus they deserve.

Research gets a strong shot in the arm, too. With the addition of six new data analysts, our research and data team will now boast eight volunteers,

tackling everything from ridership fact sheets and database research to GIS mapping and original research into trends shaping U.S. passenger rail policy. They'll be under the leadership of our own Dr. John Christoph, a phenomenal researcher and data-scientist who has been volunteering all year with us in the D.C. office.

And this is just a taste of the great team we're building. We're still accepting resumes and applications for some of the marketing, fundraising/development, and routes spokesperson roles. And we're still actively recruiting for a volunteer Director of Marketing, PR, and Communications. If you've been on the fence, please think about raising your hand for one of these positions. [You can learn more by visiting our Volunteer page at this link](#). It's never been a more exciting time to get aboard!

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!

[5 cities to hold May elections on the future of DART, FOX 4 Dallas-Fort Worth](#)

A story we covered before the holiday break. If you live in University Park, Highland Park, Farmers Branch, Irving, or Plano, TX - contact members of your city councils and tell them that they need to continue DART service.

[Amtrak Downeaster celebrates milestone with January sale, WABI](#)

"America's Favorite Train" turns 25 this year and is celebrating with a month-long sale on one-way & roundtrip tickets.

[California high-speed rail project pivots toward public-private partnership, Smart Cities Dive](#)

After the very public clash with the Trump Administration, is seeing strong interest in the form of private sector opportunities (right-of-way for fiber-optic corridors, for example) to keep things moving.

[Mardi Gras expected to bring in \\$300 million to Mobile, WKRG](#)

As Rail Passengers President & CEO has said many, MANY times (and something staff repeats any time we are on the road) - it's not that the train makes money, it's who the train makes money for.

[Virginia leaders to vote on plan to transform old railroad tracks in Shenandoah Valley, Fox 5 DC](#)

While there are those who want to see the rails torn up for a "trails only" project and more time for public input, state officials are hoping to expand the Commonwealth's passenger rail network with the Shenandoah Valley corridor.

[At 30th Street Station, deep cleaning is the 'true artisan work' of a \\$550 million renovation, Philly Voice](#)

A lot of changes are coming to the nearly 93-year-old station in the next two years.

[Amtrak Sunset Limited: What It's Like to Travel Texas by Train, Houstonia Magazine](#)

Houstonia Magazine Editor-in-chief Brittany Britto Garley rode the Sunset Limited from Houston to Alpine, sharing stories with fellow passengers along the way and welcoming the opportunity to "watch Texas unfurl from a window seat."

[Rail service stopped by coastal slide near Goleta, Santa Maria Times](#)

More issues along the Southern California coastline due to recent storms

[FRA collects \\$15.4 million in penalties from Class I railroads under new process, Trains](#)

Thanks to a new "streamlined settlement negotiation process", the FRA has collected over \$15M in civil penalties based on the Code of Federal Regulations for identified safety issues.

[Tampa's historic Union Station to undergo \\$6 million renovation, WMNF](#)

The 113-year-old Joseph F. Leitner designed station, last fixed up in the late 90s, will begin a \$6M renovation project led by local architect Jerel McCants.

[What to know if you're taking the Amtrak to Charlotte for the Panthers playoff game, WFMY](#)

Panthers fan heading to the game against the Rams this weekend? Take the train.



**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.

Upcoming Events

Advocacy Workshops + Council Business Meeting

2026 DC WORKSHOPS
+ Days on the Hill
April 20th - April 24th, 2026
Rail Passengers Office
1200 G St NW, Suite 520

[DC ADVOCACY WORKSHOPS REGISTRATION](#)

Registration is \$125.00

Due to the space limitations of our office, each of the sessions is **limited to 20 tickets** and there will be no on-site or virtual registration. Please attend the session for the state you reside in. **Registration ends at Midnight eastern on Friday, April 10th.**

The in-office workshops will run from 8:00a to 4:00p. Lunch will be provided (*attendees are responsible for their own breakfast*). Attendees will be responsible for securing their own lodging needs.

Stay tuned to www.railpassengers.org/dc2026 for more information.

2026 SPRING



[2026 SPRING COUNCIL BUSINESS MEETING REGISTRATION](#)

In-person registration is \$99
Virtual registration is free

The 2026 Spring Council Business Meeting will take place on Wednesday, April 22nd from 8:00a to 4:00p. Lunch will be provided (*attendees are responsible for their own breakfast*). Registration ends on Friday, April 10th at Midnight eastern. There will be no on-site registration.

Stay tuned to www.railpassengers.org/2026SpringCouncilMeeting for more information.

Please contact Joe Aiello (jaiello@narprrail.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**, jumped back in with both feet this week, conferring with coalition colleagues on continuing developments in the proposed Union Pacific-Norfolk Southern acquisition deal, the outlook for funding as Congress returns, and the potential for a government shutdown at the end of the month. He also interviewed several volunteer staff candidates, helped a few national news reporters with UP-NS stories, and attended to the Association's business affairs.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, spent the week doing triage on a significant backlog of correspondence that had built up over the holiday break, discussed volunteer opportunities with passenger advocates interested in engaging with our 2026 legislative program, and covered the latest developments in Amtrak's fleet renewal program.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, spent time digging out after the holiday break. Processed membership dues and donations sent to the DC office, created email solicitations for January, interviewed staff volunteer candidates and tended to the administrative and operational needs of the Association.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, hit the ground running after the extended holiday break. Worked on the final phase of our council elections, started prep for our upcoming advocacy workshops in DC, and responded to a number of supporter requests.
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, is aware of the increased volume of requests for assistance, including password and username retrieval, adding additional family members to Family-level or higher memberships, access to digital membership cards, and support with renewals. Following the extended holiday break, she is actively working through her inbox and appreciates your patience. As a reminder, a helpful fact sheet for troubleshooting many of these common issues is available on our website at: <https://www.railpassengers.org/all-aboard/join/how-to/>

Apply for Volunteer Staff at Rail Passengers Association

**VOLUNTEERS
NEEDED**



[CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE!](#)

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](#)

We Have Merch!

New items available!



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Discuss This
Week's Hotline



Service Updates
& Timetables



Visit the General
Membership Group



View Webinars



Rail Passengers'
Social Media



Take Action

Rail Passengers Timetables



RAIL PASSENGERS
ASSOCIATION

TIMETABLE



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.

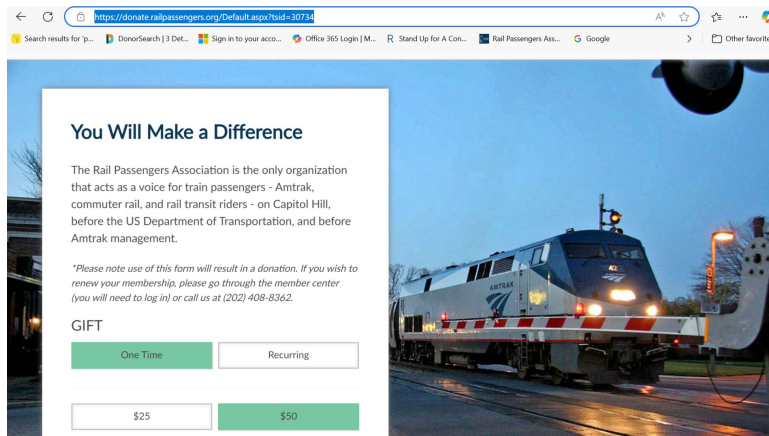
[CLICK HERE](#)

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>



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
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- and More!

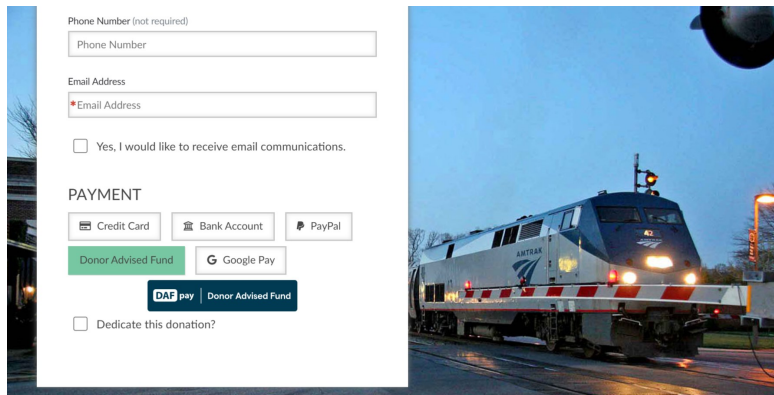
With multiple secure, protected methods of payment, you have more flexibility in the way dues are paid. Skip the hassle and [contact us](#) today for help setting up automatic or online payments.

- Setup ACH or E-Check with your bank of choice
- Use a Debit or Credit Card to pay online, or

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.

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Phone Number

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☐ Yes, I would like to receive email communications.

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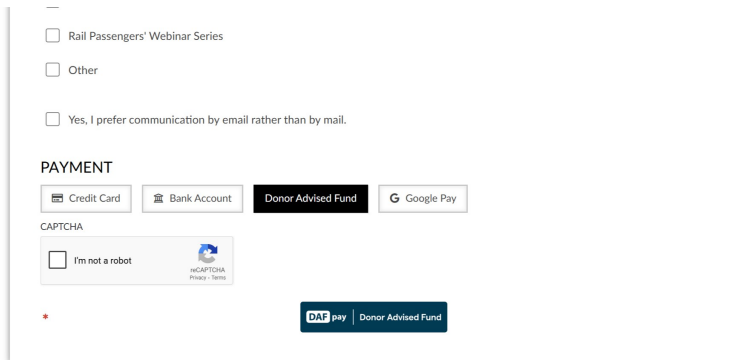
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☐ Dedicate this donation?

Membership Form:



☐ Rail Passengers' Webinar Series

☐ Other

☐ Yes, I prefer communication by email rather than by mail.

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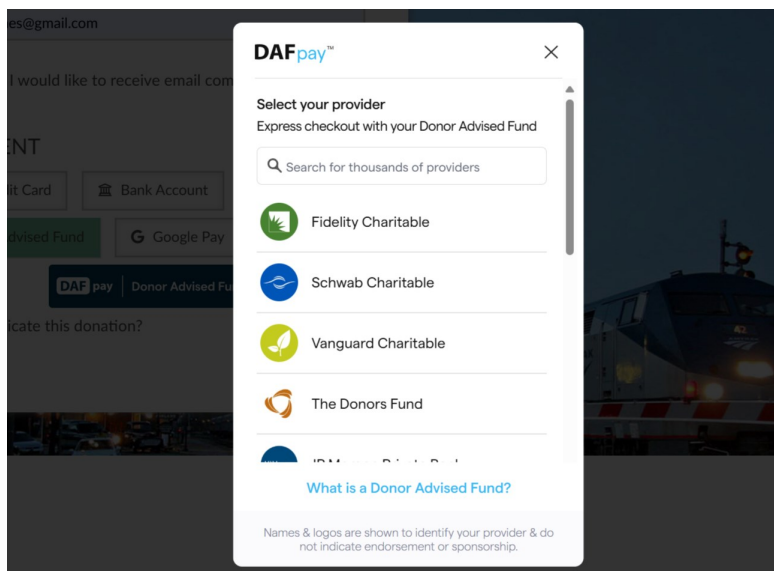
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National Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc.
dba Rail Passengers Association
1200 G Street, NW
Suite 520
Washington, DC 20005
Contact: Jonsie Stone, jstone@narprail.org
Tax ID: 36-2615221

- 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

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