



RAIL PASSENGERS

FRIDAY HOTLINE

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AUGUST 7TH, 2026



Association News

Congress To Amtrak: Not So Fast

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

Ever since [the idea first surfaced in February](#), I've been saying that there are really two separate questions surrounding the proposed restructuring of Amtrak. The first is whether restructuring Amtrak might be a good idea, and the second is whether anyone seriously believes it can be done without Congress.

This week, we got a useful reminder about that second question.

House Transportation & Infrastructure Committee Ranking Member Rep. Rick Larsen (D-Wash.) and Railroads Subcommittee Ranking Member Rep. Dina Titus (D-Nev.) **sent Amtrak a letter asking for details** ([download link at the bottom of this story](#)) about the restructuring work now underway. And while the letter raises plenty of specific questions, its larger message is pretty hard to miss.

Congress created Amtrak. Congress funds Amtrak. Congress writes the laws governing Amtrak. Congress confirms its Board members. And every few years Congress rewrites a fairly substantial portion of the rulebook under which the railroad operates.

So Congress is unlikely to sit quietly in the cheap seats while somebody fundamentally reorganizes the company.

Amtrak last week put up [a public comment portal looking for feedback](#) and thoughts from stakeholders about the proposed reshuffle. I'd say this counts as a pretty significant comment...

But there's an even more practical reason Congress matters here: money.

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One Less Obstacle for High-Speed Rail

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

Sometimes good transportation policy isn't about announcing another billion-dollar grant or cutting a ribbon. Sometimes it's about noticing that a rule written half a century ago doesn't make much sense for the technology we're trying to build today and fixing it before it becomes a problem.

The Federal Railroad Administration is proposing to do exactly that with its rules governing train noise, issued earlier this week.

The issue is pretty straightforward. America's existing railroad noise standards grew out of research done in the 1970s, when the maximum allowable train speed was 110 mph. They were written around the kinds of locomotives and railcars operating at the time.

Back then, nobody was contemplating trains running at 200 or 220 mph...that was for other countries. Most of the conversations in Official Washington during those years were about whether we should have an Amtrak at all.

This turns out to be pretty important because the source of train noise changes as trains get faster. At conventional speeds, much of the sound comes from propulsion systems and the interaction between wheels and rails. Above roughly 160 mph, aerodynamic noise increasingly takes over. Air moving around the train itself becomes the dominant source.

Oklahoma Passenger Agency Takes a Stand on UP–NS

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

Here's an interesting development in the ongoing Union Pacific–Norfolk Southern merger proceeding. [As David Lassen reports in *Trains*, ONE Transit](#), the public transit agency serving Oklahoma City and the surrounding area, wants the Surface Transportation Board to reject the proposed merger or, failing that, impose a fairly extensive set of conditions to protect passenger rail and local communities.

That makes ONE Transit something of an outlier so far.

Most of the passenger rail agencies with an interest in the proceeding have been much more tight-lipped. Metrolink, Metro-North, MBTA, Northern Indiana Commuter Transportation District and even Chicago's Metra have filed notices allowing them to participate in the proceeding without taking a position. Amtrak has been similarly quiet.

NJ Transit has gone somewhat further, warning that increased freight traffic could negatively affect commuter operations on seven lines where Norfolk Southern operates. But even NJ Transit explicitly said it wasn't taking a position on whether the merger application should be accepted or rejected.

ONE Transit did.

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[Check It Out Here!](#)

Field Notes

DC Union Station Welcomes Mini Pig Wellness Ambassador

by [Philip Mayer / Association Blogger](#)

Union Station in Washington, DC, receives approximately 100,000 passengers each day on AMTRAK, commuter trains, local metro trains, and buses. Since April of this year, these visitors have been delighted to meet Synergy, a female piglet who serves as a wellness ambassador at the train station.

Synergy is a new addition to The H3 Project, a crisis intervention and anti-human-trafficking group founded on January 1, 2020, by Dr. Ami Angell. The name of the group refers to their priorities of home, health, and happiness.

When not working with homeless clients, Dr. Angell and a leashed Synergy can be seen roaming in and around Union Station, where they are stopped every few yards by admiring travellers wanting a selfie, to pet Synergy, or just to talk. Synergy's popularity brings many people from disparate ages, backgrounds, and stations in life together and talking when they otherwise rarely would. There are some regular commuters who more frequently see Synergy, and she seems to recognize them. When she would prefer to walk through the station without being noticed, Dr. Angell carries Synergy in a soft sling across her body.

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 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!

[A Tribute to John Spain](#), Southern Rail Commission

John Spain, one of the longest-serving commissioners in the history of the renowned Southern Rail Commission - whose "run a train" leadership has helped reshape passenger rail in the Gulf Coast - is stepping down from his role as a commissioner.

[VIDEO] [Public Board Meeting: July 29, 2026](#), Amtrak Media

ICYMI: Amtrak uploaded the full video of last week's Board meeting

[Brightline Miami station retail faces \\$65M foreclosure](#), The Real Deal

This has been a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad year (or so) for the financial side of Brightline in Florida - this time the news comes from their retail space in the MiamiCentral station

[MBTA completes Red Line infrastructure work](#), Progressive Railroading

The "Red Line Warriors" in the Boston area have survived the MBTA's 10-day closure between Alewife and Park Street stations, which included station cleaning and renovations, track repair, signal upgrades, and bridge inspection.

[MBTA Green and Orange line shutdowns August 2025: Dates, shuttles and detours](#), Masslive

As the old saying goes, it's going to get worse before it gets better. MBTA riders are feeling that crunch at the moment.

[Ford CEO's chief of staff named CEO of Michigan Central](#), Detroit News

Cobbina will oversee the 30-acre district that will be the future home of a NoMad hotel, Detroit City FC's new home stadium, and an MDOT transit hub that will feature Amtrak's return to Michigan Central for the first time in nearly 40 years.

[Amtrak adding 2nd trip from Pittsburgh to New York](#), CBS News

A 2nd Pennsylvanian is set to debut later this year.

[Study lays groundwork for Illinois regional transit under NITA](#), Progressive Railroading

Chicago's Regional Transportation Authority is getting its house in order before the Sept 1st changeover to the Northern Illinois Transit Authority

[STV has been Selected to Modernize Amtrak Converter Station, Zweglis](#)

Amtrak's Richmond SFC Station in Philadelphia is the country's largest rail static frequency converter (SFC) station and the sixth biggest in the world. New York City based STV will be tasked with modernizing module #4 (there are 5 total at the facility)



**WE ARE WORKING ON A DISCORD SERVER.
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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

Association Events



From Simulators to Spirits - What's Waiting for You Friday at RailNation: Toledo

You are cordially invited to the Rail Passengers "Science Fair"

If you're coming to Ohio for [RailNation: Toledo](#) in October, make sure you include Friday in your plans. That's because we've got an incredibly fun and informative day planned for all attendees at the historic MLK Plaza train hall above today's Toledo Amtrak station, and if you miss Friday, you'll be missing out on a lot!

There are still a few finishing touches to add, but beginning Friday morning you'll be able to try out Amtrak's locomotive simulator, see demonstrations by Amtrak Police and their K9 unit, and visit with Amtrak government affairs and project leaders to talk about anything that's on your mind. As part of that display, we'll have Amtrak leaders working on the long-distance Superliner replacement procurement on hand to hear your thoughts and ideas, as well as to offer updates on where the project stands. We're also working on a few more potential exhibits and displays.



TARTA, Toledo's transit agency, has exciting plans, too, and is ready to show them off in an exhibit about their new bus rapid transit project and efforts to build a multimodal transit hub right nearby. They'll be bringing virtual reality equipment to help you see and experience what hasn't been built yet - plus they will be bringing groups of people throughout the event to tour their current facilities.

And, thanks to TARTA, we'll have a shuttle running directly from the conference hotel to the train station, making it easy for you to experience this mini-exhibition.

If you have already registered for the conference, your entry to the "[science fair](#)" is included and you are good to go. There will be a \$20 fee for those locally who want to just come for the day (but you **MUST** register by September 18th).

We'll also continue the tradition of kicking off RailNation with "[Ale Nation](#)," hosted in Toledo by our friends at Toledo Spirits. This is a capacity-controlled event due to the size of the space, so you have to get in on it soon if you want to attend (*the \$35 ticket includes light apps and a signature drink created by our own Joe Aiello*). [All Aboard Ohio](#)'s Mitch Radakovich will be there to co-host and talk about big advances in local advocacy.

The [hotel](#) knows a lot of our folks will be coming on the train, so they're suggesting attendees consider booking a Thursday arrival and a Sunday departure.

It sounds like marketing hype, but it's not. From me to you, you're going to regret missing any of these great activities, and I hope you'll take advantage of this heads-up to be sure you're able to attend.

[Click Here For The RailNation Website](#)



Local Meetings + Events

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

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, followed up on some Maine rail-related issues after his visit last week with legislative allies near Augusta, spent time refining ideas around addressing the newly raised liability cap and how that will affect transit agencies and startup rail operations, did a couple of press interviews, and wrapped up the week checking in with coalition partners working on responses to Union Pacific's proposed takeover of Norfolk Southern.

Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy, was off the first half of the week on vacation. He returned to catch up on Congressional action to advance legislation to extend transportation funding through December 2026, and worked with President & CEO Jim Mathews to develop the Association's response to recent developments in the proposed merger between Union Pacific and Norfolk Southern.

Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff, crafted outreach messages, processed membership dues and donations sent to the DC office, began closing July financials and tended to the administrative/operational needs of the Association.

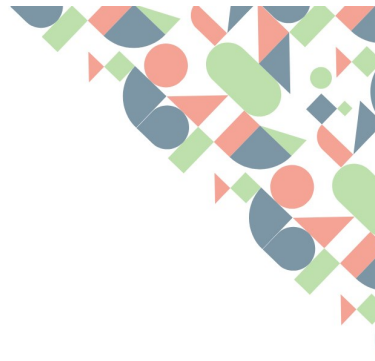
Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing, was busy finalizing plans with several of our speakers for RailNation coming up in October and corresponded with a number of our supporters on travel issues and to talk about upcoming projects. He also worked on some internal communication plans.

John Christoph, Chief Data Scientist & Research/Analysis Lead, and the rest of the Research & Analysis team completed a 20-page report on our *Association's* new-and-improved model for predicting Amtrak ridership on new and expanded services. We have submitted this paper to the Transportation Research Board for peer-review, and if accepted we will have the opportunity to present our findings at the 2027 TRB Annual Meeting in Washington, DC in January. In the meantime, we will be providing an overview of this new model at Rail Nation Toledo, examining the proposed network of new Amtrak routes across Ohio as a case study.

Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant, continued evaluating the Association's membership offerings to ensure they remain meaningful, relevant, and aligned with the needs of today's members. In addition to supporting renewals and assisting members with the online portal, Kimberly has been working on membership outreach and stewardship initiatives designed to strengthen member engagement and retention.

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Membership How-To

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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.

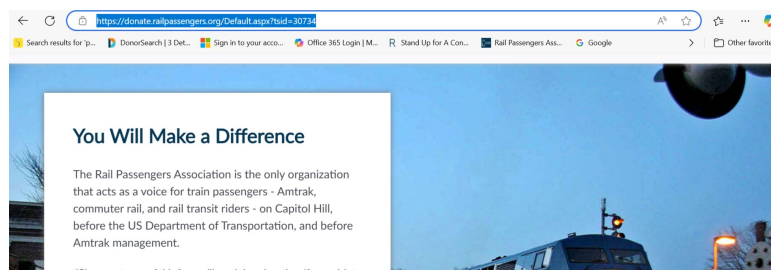
[CLICK HERE](https://railpassengers.org/timetables)

NOTE: Because we do update the links on our website - please bookmark **the main page** and not the individual schedules

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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>



*Please note use of this form will result in a donation. If you wish to renew your membership, please go through the member center (you will need to log in) or call us at (202) 408-8362.

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

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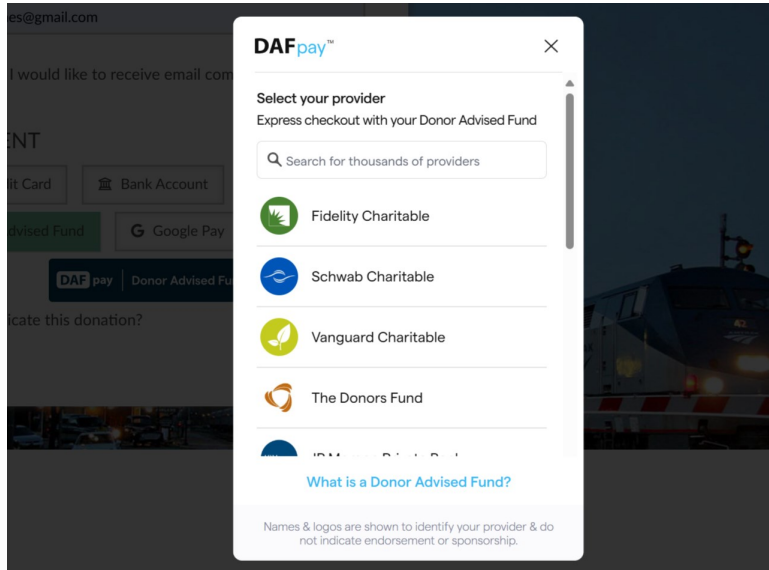
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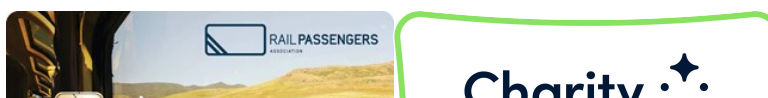


Select your provider, then follow their prompts. If you need to provide information on Rail Passengers Association, please use the below:

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Suite 520
Washington, DC 20005
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- **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.

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2026

Rail Passengers Association Earns 3-Star Rating from Charity Navigator

Rail Passengers Association's strong financial health and commitment to accountability and transparency have earned it a 3-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.



RAIL PASSENGERS

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