

# RAILPASSENGERS



## WEEKLY HOTLINE

Issue #1,389—March 21, 2025

### NOTICE

Due to staff being on-site and occupied with the RailNation:DC Regional Workshops over the next two weeks, there will be no Hotline over this time frame.

Please stay tuned to our social media channels during the workshops for live video, pictures, feedback, news, etc. - and we're sure there will be a special guest or two along the way.

#HotlineFriday will return on April 11th.

**Share your thoughts, feelings, and reactions to issues you may have had on a recent Amtrak trip.** Thanks to your support and participation in previous surveys, we have been able to take the passenger's voice straight to Congress and Amtrak Executives. Help us keep hammering the message home by sharing this survey with other passengers!



## Association News

### Gardner's Ouster Makes Grassroots' Task More Urgent

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

So the "purge" has now come for Amtrak. After 16 years at the railroad spanning roles from intern to Chief Operating Officer before ascending to the top seat, Stephen Gardner abruptly resigned as Amtrak's CEO, a move widely reported to have been orchestrated by the White House.

Writes [Bill Stephens at Trains magazine](#): "Nothing good will come from Wednesday's dismissal of Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner, who was pushed out as part of the White House's purge of officials who are not deemed loyal to President Donald Trump."

[Railway Age Capitol Hill Contributing Editor Frank Wilner was even more blunt](#): "Few Amtrak presidents in the passenger railroad's more than half-century of existence match Gardner's devotion to the brand and its employees. Self-described as a political liberal—he previously held senior Democratic Senate staff positions—Gardner becomes another casualty of an Administration whose biases are so undisguised and repulsive that a French member of the European Parliament called for the United States to return the Statue of Liberty to France."

In theory at least, Gardner's removal was up to the Amtrak Board, whose members are nominated by the President and confirmed to serve with the advice and consent of the Senate. By all accounts, however, Gardner's removal did not come from the Board but instead from the Administration.

Sidelining Amtrak's Board is a bad sign, in my view. And in his piece for Trains, Stephens predicts that "Congress won't ride to the rescue as Trump and Musk take aim at passenger rail."

There was a time, very recently, when I would have disputed Stephens' assessment. Shortly after the election, the professional staff and I briefed Association Board members, Council members, and many grassroots advocates on what we thought was the state of play.

We reasoned that the razor-thin majorities in Congress – down to a single seat in the House at least until special elections are complete this Spring, and seven shy of the 60 votes needed to invoke cloture in the Senate – would force legislators in both chambers to negotiate more. We also pointed out that it was seven House Republicans last year who locked arms to stop the disastrous “Kill Amtrak” appropriation bill, and that in 2017 it was Senate Republicans who halted the first Trump Administration’s assault on long-distance service.

But as Stephens notes, on nearly every issue other than trains, members of Congress have appeared willing or even eager to cede their responsibility as a co-equal branch of government – a flaccid stance that bodes poorly for our issues.

“If Republicans in Congress are afraid to stand up to Trump’s plans to cut 83,000 Veterans Affairs jobs – a move that will only hurt medical care for veterans – they’re certainly not going to be willing to take a bullet for Amtrak,” Stephens says.

Indeed.

I’ve had legislators at all levels tell me over the years that sometimes they need “top cover” from their constituents to do the right thing. Like the veterans demanding action from their elected representatives to take action on VA hospitals, all of us who care about passenger rail need to make sure that Congress knows the value passenger rail brings where we live and how we need more of it, not less.

And that makes getting your voice into congressional offices that much more important. Many of our grassroots advocates will start arriving this weekend in Washington, DC, for our annual visit to Capitol Hill. This year, with so much at stake, we’re doing this in four separate waves across a two-week period, blanketing Congress with constituents to explain why Amtrak service is a good investment of public dollars, how much value it brings to the communities where they live, work, or study, and why continued expansion, growth, and improvement means so much to their towns.

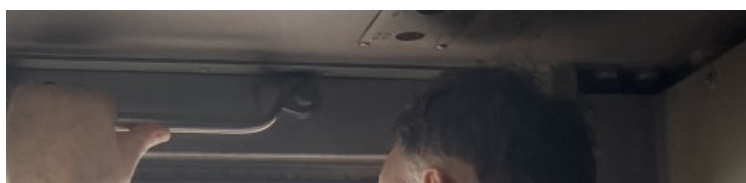
All of us who care about passenger rail need to deliver that message forcefully to our members of Congress, whether in person during the next two weeks or even by calling, writing, or visiting your legislator’s or Senator’s local district office. But this time the message needs to be more than just why we need passenger rail where we live. It must focus on the fact that all of us, as voters, rely on them to act on our behalf. They represent us. Their votes matter. And polling consistently shows that passenger rail enjoys support in both Republican districts and Democratic ones. We need to be more persistent, more focused, and speak with more conviction than ever before.

Meanwhile, at one of the most pivotal moments in its history, Amtrak will have to get by without a designated leader. That’s a tough situation for any large organization, but with the additional layer of political scrutiny it’s that much worse for the staff at Amtrak. This may even be more acute for the new blood already brought into Amtrak with the assignment to attack Amtrak’s well-known mechanical and operational challenges. Many are confused, and many more are now demoralized. I know, because I’ve already talked to about three dozen of them since yesterday.

At Railway Age, [Frank Wilner pointed to Gardner’s “devotion” to Amtrak’s mission](#), and brand, and people. When news outlets called me Thursday for comment, I had much the same thought, telling them that “In every interaction I’ve had with Stephen – and there were many – there was never any doubt that he loved trains, loved passenger rail, and loved Amtrak.”

The event that made me think about that as my response to reporters was this: our ride together, with many other stakeholders and elected officials, on [the inaugural run last year of the new Borealis from St. Paul to Chicago](#).

We were pulling into one of the many stations where the platform was crowded to capacity with local elected officials waiting to welcome the long-awaited service to their community, service which hundreds of grassroots advocates and organizations had spent decades coaxing into existence. Service which has, since its launch, blown the doors off any projections or expectations, with ridership soaring past initial estimates. Service which is vitally needed to support small businesses all along the route, and which has already given places like Red Wing, Minn., or Tomah, Wisc., a badly needed shot in the arm.





As we rounded a bend and crossed the Mississippi River, Gardner led the way into the vestibule. Gardner, [a guy who started a high school punk band named Chessie in honor of the Chesapeake and Ohio Railway](#), and who moved to Maine after college to work as a conductor on the Maine Central Railroad, opened the upper portion of the door to peer out at the crowd on the platform waiting to celebrate. **The expression on his face, which I'm sure he didn't realize that I noticed, was pure joy, of the sort you can't fake.**

For all of our sakes, let's hope against hope that whoever sits in that seat next believes in the mission of a nationwide network of passenger-rail service.

---

## LAST DAY - Board & MARC Election

Every year, we give interested Rail Passengers Association members the opportunity to deepen their involvement in the Association's work by serving on the Board of Directors or the Membership Action Review Committee (MARC). **We are now accepting candidates wishing to be elected to the Board of Directors as a Director for a three-year term ending with the Business meeting in 2028.** Current Non-Board Council members may also apply to serve a one-year term on the MARC ending with the Business Meeting in 2026.

**The application submission deadline is 11:59 PM Eastern time on Friday, March 21, 2025.**

While floor nominations will be accepted, being approved before the business meeting allows members of the Council to know of your intent in advance.

Any RPA/NARP member who meets the qualifications may apply to one of the two Director seats that are up for election this year, and any current Non-Board Council of Representatives member may apply to one of the five seats on the Council's Membership Action Review Committee. Before applying, it is highly recommended that you review these position responsibilities and qualifications:

[Position Description for Board Director](#)

[Position Description for MARC Member](#)

Please note that current Directors or MARC Members whose terms are expiring in 2025 must also submit a Candidate Information Statement by the March 21 deadline in order to be listed on the ballots to be distributed to the Council Members. If you are currently serving on the MARC and this is your third consecutive one-year term of service, you may not apply for re-election at this time.

If you are interested in applying for a Director seat: [CLICK HERE](#)

If you are interested in applying for a MARC Member seat: [CLICK HERE](#)

**The CIS submission deadline is Friday, March 21, 2025, at 11:59 PM Eastern time. The election will take place virtually starting Saturday, March 29, 2025, and lasting through Friday, April 4, 2025.**

Please contact Steven H. Musen by email at [musensth@cox.net](mailto:musensth@cox.net) if you have questions or would like to know more about serving on the Board or the MARC.

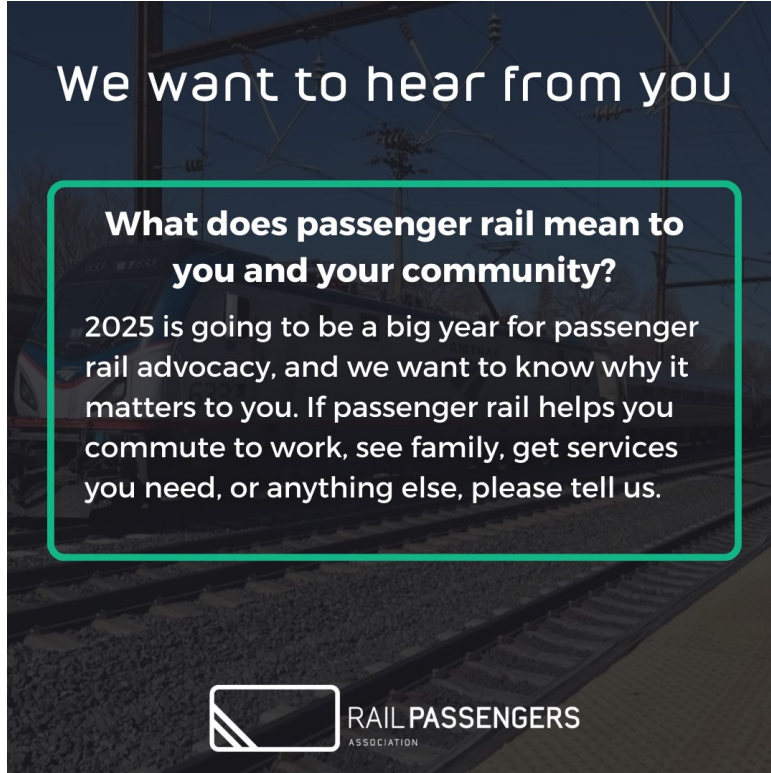
---

## Field Notes

Please email [Joe Aiello](#) if you have any local, state or regional stories/projects that you would like to see get highlighted in the Hotline.

---

## What's Your Story?



**We want to hear from you**

**What does passenger rail mean to you and your community?**

2025 is going to be a big year for passenger rail advocacy, and we want to know why it matters to you. If passenger rail helps you commute to work, see family, get services you need, or anything else, please tell us.



We're gearing up for a big year of advocacy in 2025, and we want your stories to help us connect to elected officials, government agencies, and local advocates on why passenger rail matters.

We want you to tell us what passenger rail means to you and your community. Whether it helps you commute to work, see family and friends, get services you need, or anything else, please tell us.

[Tell Us Your Story!](#)

---

## RAILNATION:DC 2025



**RAILNATION: DC 2025**

**Regional Summits  
& Day on the Hill**

**March 24th - April 3rd, 2025**

**Rail Passengers Office & Conference Room**



Supported By



Come to DC to tell members of Congress **YOUR** passenger-rail story! This year, our Spring RailNation:DC events will expand to include two full weeks of visits to Capitol Hill, and we need you to stand up and be counted! Visits, along with workshops to help you prepare, will take place over a two-week period from March 24th to April 3rd and will be broken into sessions for nine regions around the country.



(Click the links below to view the agenda for each region)

**March 24th & 25th** - [Northeast and Mid-Atlantic](#)

**March 26th & 27th** - [Southeast, Southern, and South Central](#)

**March 31st & April 1st** - [Midwest](#)

**April 2nd & April 3rd** - [Northwest, Southwest, and Mountains/Plains](#)

Please go to [railpassengers.org/dc25](https://railpassengers.org/dc25) for up-to-date information about the workshops and Council business meeting.

## Hotline Links

A curated selection of passenger rail and transportation stories from this week. Check out our social media feeds on [Twitter](#) & [Facebook](#) to read breaking news and join the conversation!

- [New legislature looks to restore Shore Line East service](#), WFSB

We have heard stories from around the country on how ridership has, in many cases, bounced back completely to pre-pandemic levels. This is, sadly, not the case for Shore Line East service in CT - but members of the CT State House want to change that.

- [B Line plan moves ahead](#), Longfellow Nokomis Messenger

While not a rail project, it is part of a multimodal plan that includes both the Green & Blue lines in the Twin Cities. When completed, the B Line BRT will allow travelers to connect to either light rail line without the need to head all the way into downtown Minneapolis.

- [Atlanta must go forwards — not backwards — when it comes to Beltline rail](#), SaportaReport

After a \$15M investment and over 30% of final design and engineering work already completed - why is Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens planning on scrapping the near shovel ready Eastside Trail in favor of a "hodge-podge of various disconnected transit modes".

- [Amtrak Downeaster Station in Wells Getting \\$11.8M Expansion](#), WJBQ

The single-platform station in Wells, ME is beginning a near \$12M facelift - including a 2nd boarding platform, overhead bridge, and a number of new upgrades to make traveling easier for passengers.

- [Official suggests combining Dallas-Fort Worth area commuter rail operations](#), Trains

With the threat of a bill in the Texas State House that would allow for commutes to slash funding, ideas are coming to light on how to keep public transit moving from the four authorizes in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

- [NCDOT is considering a "temporary station" at Charlotte Gateway Station, records show](#), Axios

With a new Charlotte station still a few years away from a ribbon cutting, the North Carolina Department of Transportation is mulling over plans to open a temporary station on state owned property across from the future multimodal development.

- [Germantown dreams big for SEPTA station site](#), The Chestnut Hill Local

SEPTA has selected a sizable vacant lot adjacent to the Germantown Station on Cheltenham Avenue for a flagship transit-oriented mixed-use development project. This initiative aims to revitalize the area by integrating residential, commercial, and community spaces, enhancing both transit accessibility and local economic growth.

- [State House Approves Bill Mapping Out Amtrak Cascades Upgrades, The Urbanist](#)

Increased speed, frequency, and on-time performance for Amtrak's Cascade Service between Vancouver & Portland is closer to reality thanks to the passing of House Bill 1837 last week.

- [Amtrak, L.A. Metro update mobile apps to improve passenger experience, Mass Transit](#)

Amtrak is enhancing its mobile app to make ticket access & train status easier than ever, according to EVP Eliot Hamlisch. Plus, L.A. Metro just launched a new app for their Metro Micro rideshare service.

- [How Amtrak keeps its social media strategy on track for Gen Z, EMarketer](#)

A small peek into Amtrak's push to reach the younger generation of passengers.



[WE ARE NOW ON BLUE SKY!](#)

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

- [RailNation: DC 2025](#)  
March 24–April 3
- [WisARP Spring 2025 General Membership Meeting](#)  
Saturday, April 5, 9:00a
- [2025 ESPA \(& Rail Passengers Association\) Annual Passenger Rail Advocates Meeting & Lunch](#)  
Saturday, April 5, 11:00a
- [21st Annual Southwestern Rail Conference](#)  
April 7–8

Please contact Joe Aiello ([jaiello@narprail.org](mailto: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**, presented this week to the Washington Area Railway Engineering Society and then traveled to Easton, Pennsylvania, for the inaugural meeting of All Aboard Lehigh Valley attended by local leaders and planners and organized by Council member Brett Webber. He also did many interviews with reporters in the wake of Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner's ouster.
- **Sean Jeans-Gail, Vice President of Policy**, spent the week coordinating the Association's response to Amtrak CEO Stephen Gardner stepping down at the request of the White House, while trying to nail down the last logistics for next week's RNDC.
- **Jonsie Stone, Chief of Staff**, worked with the team to prepare for RailNation:DC, collaborated with our Accounting partners to finalize December/2024 financials and begin closing January/February 2025 financials, processed membership dues and donations, assisted members and donors with questions and tended to the Association's administrative and operational needs.
- **Joe Aiello, Director of Community Engagement & Organizing**, worked with our workshop attendees on last minute details for the next two weeks in DC as well as helping to secure Hill meetings.
- **Kimberly Notarianni, Membership Management Consultant**, struggled with a bit of laryngitis this week due to allergies so if she didn't

get a chance to return a call (and we do not have an email in your portal), she sends her apologies. If you are renewing your RPA membership, please note that the *RENEW* button has not yet been configured in the CharityEngine User Portal. It will appear as if you have to sign up for a “new” membership. Please DO! All of your history is there. As we are still transitioning over renewals and memberships from December through the February 19 (that were processed in NEON) transition date, it is taking a bit of time to snap those puzzle pieces together. If you have purchased a FAMILY membership or above and need to add a new member to your household, please email Kimberly with the names and emails of those members to be added and she will link them to your household.

- **Lili Leonard, Development Assistant**, is still plugging away at corporate sponsorships and business partnership opportunities to support the Association. Our new-and-improved corporate supporter offerings will be on the website soon! Stay tuned!

---

Starting **Wednesday, February 19th**, all membership, donation, and event registration transactions are being processed through **CharityEngine**. **Neon** is no longer the Association’s CRM of record.

If you have the **Neon User Center** bookmarked, please update it to: <https://membership.railpassengers.org/usercenter>.

Your **Neon username and Account ID** have already been transferred to CharityEngine. However, because your **password was unique to Neon**, you will need to reset it when logging in for the first time.

Below is a screenshot of the **CharityEngine Constituent Portal** for reference.

Log in

Remember me [Forgot password?](#)

LOG IN

Over the coming weeks and months, we will continue to enhance the system. If you have any questions or need assistance, please please [email Kimberly A. Notarianni](#)

As with any upgrade, there may be minor hiccups. Your Association staff is here to help and if necessary, work with CharityEngine to gain the answers. We are excited by the full complement of options and benefits that will be available to our supporters through one system.

Thank you for your patience and cooperation.

---

[View Webinars](#) [Rail Passengers' Social Media](#)

## Rail Passengers Webinars

*Miss out on our past events? You can watch them on our [YouTube channel](#) or through our website at [railpassengers.org/webinars](http://railpassengers.org/webinars)*





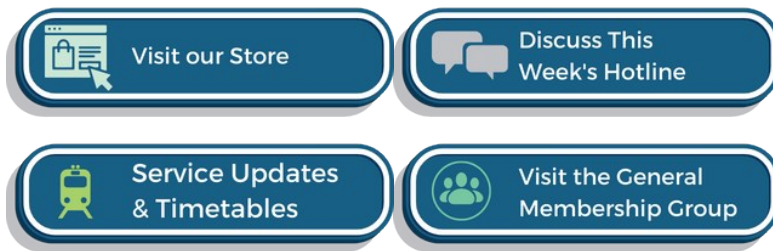
## We Have Merch!

### OUR ICONIC STATEMENT

For years, the “*I’d Rather Be On The Train*” bumper sticker was a favorite among our members, with many requesting extras, so they could share with their family & friends. Over time, one of the most asked questions whenever we are in the field has been if we are ever going to bring that sticker back (one day!).

We are, **ONCE AGAIN**, dusting off this classic statement for our holiday merch drop - and this year, with a well known historic twist,

\*\*Do you own Association gear? Show us your selfies and let us know what products you want to see next! Contact [Joe Aiello](#) for merch information and questions about our products.\*\*



---

## Rail Passengers Timetables

### HUGE Spring Update from 3/6/2025

Nearly every in-house schedule has been updated and posted.

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](#)



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



## Other Ways to Make an Impact this Holiday Season

Did you know that individual donors make up more than two-thirds (67%) of charitable giving in the U.S., and that many of those donations are made in the last two months of the year? As you make your year-end giving plans, please consider a contribution to Rail Passengers Association using the methods below – making a meaningful difference for passenger rail in the U.S. while maximizing your tax advantages and fulfilling minimum retirement withdrawal requirements.

### Donor Advised Fund (DAF)

Donor-advised funds are the fastest-growing charitable giving vehicle in the United States because they are one of the easiest and most tax-advantageous ways to give to charity. [Click here](#) to learn more and consult with your financial advisor to determine if establishing a Donor Advised Fund is right for you.

### Required Minimum Distribution (RMD)

Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) are minimum amounts that IRA and retirement plan account owners generally must withdraw annually starting with the year they reach age 73. [Click here](#) to learn more about RMDs and consult with your financial advisor to determine if an RMD is right for you.

### Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD)

A Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) is a direct transfer of assets from an IRA to a qualified charity. QCDs are a popular way for Americans 70 ½ years or older to donate to charity while also satisfying their RMDs. [Click here](#) to learn more about QCDs and consult with your financial advisor to determine if a QCD is right for you.

---

## 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](http://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

Charity   
Navigator



◆ FOUR-STAR ◆

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](http://www.railpassengers.org)