

OPINION

RPA sells out to Amtrak: Taking railroad's money to promote Gateway boondoggle compromises its independence

Form 990		EXTENDED TO MAY 15, 2024 Return of Organization Exempt From Income Tax		OMB No. 1545-0047
Department of the Treasury Internal Revenue Service		Under section 501(c), 527, or 4947(a)(1) of the Internal Revenue Code (except private foundations) Do not enter social security numbers on this form as it may be made public. Go to www.irs.gov/Form990 for instructions and the latest information.		2022 Open to Public Inspection
A For the 2022 calendar year, or tax year beginning JUL 1, 2022 and ending JUN 30, 2023				
B Check if applicable: Address change Name change Initial return Final return/terminated Amended return Application pending	C Name of organization REGIONAL PLAN ASSOCIATION, INC.		D Employer identification number 13-1624154	
	Doing business as			
	Number and street (or P.O. box if mail is not delivered to street address) Room/suite		E Telephone number	
	ONE WHITEHALL STREET, 16TH FLOOR		212-420-6613	
	City or town, state or province, country, and ZIP or foreign postal code		G Gross receipts \$ 9,133,201.	
NEW YORK, NY 10004		H(a) Is this a group return for subordinates? Yes ☒ No		
F Name and address of principal officer: THOMAS K. WRIGHT		H(b) Are all subordinates included? Yes No		
SAME AS C ABOVE		If "No," attach a list. See instructions		
I Tax-exempt status: ☒ 501(c)(3) 501(c) () (insert no.) 4947(a)(1) or 527		H(c) Group exemption number		
J Website: WWW.RPA.ORG				
K Form of organization: ☒ Corporation Trust Association Other		L Year of formation: 1929 M State of legal domicile: NY		
Part I Summary				
is & Governance	1 Briefly describe the organization's mission or most significant activities: PROMOTE IMPROVEMENT OF QUALITY OF LIFE/ECONOMY IN THE NEW YORK, NEW JERSEY & CONNECTICUT TRI-STATE			
	2 Check this box ☐ if the organization discontinued its operations or disposed of more than 25% of its net assets.			
	3 Number of voting members of the governing body (Part VI, line 1a)			103
	4 Number of independent voting members of the governing body (Part VI, line 1b)			103
	5 Total number of individuals employed in calendar year 2022 (Part V, line 2a)			47

By **NEW YORK DAILY NEWS EDITORIAL BOARD**

PUBLISHED: August 24, 2025 at 4:00 AM EDT

The nonprofit [Regional Plan Association](#), long considered a reliable, independent and objective voice — has taken upwards of a million dollars in federal tax money from Amtrak to promote the railway's Gateway project \$50 billion boondoggle, casting anything the group has to say about the future of Penn Station and Gateway in doubt.

The infusion from Amtrak — which we are reporting publicly here for the first time — undermines RPA's role in helping frame critical debates around land use, transportation, environment and governance. On the controversial fight over Penn and Gateway, the group's research and reports and statements cannot be trusted by the public and policy makers as critical questions about the future of the area are weighed.

What should happen with Penn Station and Madison Square Garden? Should the alignment of the new Hudson tunnel be an inefficient separate and parallel one to the existing 1910 tunnel or should it be a much smarter straddling of the old line? Does the new tunnel need expensive and [outdated technology like bench walls](#)? Why not fix the 1910 tunnel immediately using the proven repair in place method of nights and weekends? We have urged more efficient and effective steps and every time RPA adheres to Amtrak's extravagant plans. Taking Amtrak's money means RPA cannot be reliable, independent or objective.

As this [editorial page has documented for years](#), Gateway is a boondoggle because it vastly overbuilds a new passenger rail connection under the Hudson. Tens of billions in taxpayer funds would be wasted, with the biggest and most wasteful component being the planned demolition of a large swatch of Midtown south of Penn Station, centered on Block 780.

Gov. Hochul is [correctly flat-out opposed to the Block 780 foolishness](#) (which would destroy a neighborhood and cost close to \$20 billion), but RPA, after taking Amtrak's money, is sticking with Amtrak.

RPA's paid relationship has been going on for years as Gateway has been debated in Washington, on both sides of the Hudson and in these pages and through it all RPA has been cheering the maximalist position held by Amtrak, such as Block 780.

Which explains why RPA poo poos anything that deviates from Amtrak's grand scheme, like the much smarter [alternative of through-running of trains in one side and out the other side of Penn](#) instead of a dead-end terminal like 780 would be. Now we know why.

Here is the info as submitted by RPA: "Build Gateway Now Coalition – RPA launched the Build Gateway Now Coalition five years ago, bringing together over 40 civic, business and labor partners to support the nation's most critical infrastructure project: the Gateway Program. Through original research, communication efforts (social media, op/eds, digital public engagement tools, regular contact with the media), advocacy efforts (testifying at Gateway Development Commission board meetings, lobbying in Washington DC, hosting press conferences and other rallies), our coalition has helped move the project along and made it clear in the public eye that the Gateway Program must be built. Our work is supported by Amtrak. We received a \$350,000 grant for 18 months starting January 2022. Our grant was recently renewed and increased by \$500,000 for 18 months"

RPA's 990 also says that it is "America's oldest and most distinguished independent urban research and advocacy group." It's not so independent any more.

Additionally, there is this on the LinkedIn profile of an Amtrak public relations executive:

"Manage approx. \$1 million contract with the Regional Plan Association (RPA) to operate the Build Gateway Now Coalition, including original scholarly research illustrating the need for and benefits of the Gateway Program."

We asked both RPA and Amtrak for the contract and both declined to provide it, Amtrak saying that we should submit a [Freedom of Information Act request.](#)

For this congressionally appropriated money Amtrak has purchased the reputation of RPA. RPA President and CEO Tom Wright tells us that RPA's support for a new rail tunnel goes back decades and RPA has not changed its stand at all. That is correct, but by accepting payment from Amtrak, RPA shifted from being an independent advocate to being a paid lobbyist.

Amtrak selected Wright to lead the [Penn Station Working Advisory Group](#), which means that Amtrak has selected someone who they are treating as their own paid lobbyist.

Amtrak said only: "Amtrak collaborates with a variety of partners on several projects across the country. We will continue to work with partners who share our commitment to safety, efficiency, and reliability, while making the best use of taxpayer investments."

26-FOI-00193 00000005617 "UNCLASSIFIED" 1/29/2026

There have been 24 meetings of the [bistate Gateway Development Commission](#) since 2022, when the Amtrak contract with RPA began.

RPA had a person [appearing at each of those meetings](#) to speak during the public comment portion to extoll the Gateway project and cheer it on, never once disclosing the fact that Amtrak was paying. We put our questions to RPA on Monday and at [Wednesday's GDC meeting](#) there was no public comment from RPA. We wonder why not.

2025 > August > 24