

EDITORS' PICK

Trump Taps Business Associate Of Megadonor Timothy Mellon For Railroad Role

The president-elect's nominee to lead the Federal Railroad Administration has longstanding business ties to an heir of the Mellon banking fortune.

Donald Trump has tapped a former business partner of a top donor for a key role in his administration.

In a Truth Social post Saturday, the president-elect announced his nomination of David Fink to lead the Federal Railroad Administration, an agency within the Department of Transportation responsible for rail safety and infrastructure funding.

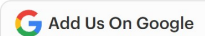
Fink's relationship with Timothy Mellon—an heir to the Mellon banking fortune who spent at least \$150 million backing Trump's 2024 campaign—spans decades and generations.

Fink's father, a fourth-generation railroader also named David Fink,

first crossed paths with Mellon in the 1970s, as Mellon later recounted in his memoir. At the time, the elder Fink was a manager at the Penn Central railroad, while Mellon, having recently sold the rights to a computer operating system he developed, was focused on his nonprofit, the Sachem Fund.

Mellon's organization aimed to "seek potential solutions for social problems," one of which Mellon identified as restoring the abandoned Poughkeepsie Bridge spanning the Hudson River in New York. By chance, Mellon attended a lecture near his seaside cottage in Guilford, Connecticut, where Fink presented, focusing on the Poughkeepsie Bridge. Mellon recruited Fink to collaborate on the restoration project. That endeavor went nowhere, but their partnership endured.

In 1977, just months after their first meeting, Fink and Mellon teamed up to launch Perma Treat, a Connecticut-based sawmill and pressure-treating plant specializing in railroad ties. In the early 1980s, the duo moved into the railroad industry itself, incorporating the holding company Guilford Transportation Industries and acquiring three railroads for a combined \$43 million. Fink and Mellon's efficiency-minded approach, abandoning unprofitable track and cutting the number of workers required to operate trains, sparked major labor strikes but also helped modernize the industry.



New York State Senator Joseph Bruno, left, and David Fink, president of Pan Am Railways, board a locomotive in 2008 following the announcement of a new rail terminal. (Photo by John Carl D'Annibale /Albany Times Union via Getty Images)

ALBANY TIMES UNION VIA GETTY IMAGES

By September 1998, the younger David Fink had joined his father and Mellon, first as the president of Perma Treat and then as the executive vice president of Guilford Rail System, according to a clipping from the Boston Globe featured in a Boston & Main Railroad Historical Society's newsletter.

In 1998, the elder Fink and Mellon bought the bankrupt Pan Am airline brand, using it to reposition their rail company. Eight years later, the younger Fink received a promotion from executive vice president to president of Pan Am Railways. During his tenure, the Federal Railroad Administration audited the railways in the wake of two fatal accidents in 2021 and 2022. "Leading up to the audit, FRA had critical safety concerns with Pan Am's safety and the apparent failure of Pan Am's leadership to take action to develop a positive safety culture throughout the organization," the report said.

Fink remained Pan Am Railway's president until its sale to CSX for \$600 million in 2022, according to rails.com.

The elder Fink died shortly after the consummation of that deal. His son currently works as a part-time lecturer at Northeastern University, his alma mater, where he focuses on supply chain and information management.

Fink does not appear to have made any substantial donations to Trump's 2024 campaign, though any contribution would have likely been a rounding error next to Mellon's \$150 million. Fink, Mellon and the Trump transition did not immediately respond to requests for comment. The Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation will hold Fink's confirmation hearing after the new Congress is seated.