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## Executive Director Report, March 2026

*Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing*

### Federal Funding and IMLS Update

On March 17, the Committee on Education and Workforce Training moved forward [HR 7661](#), which “threatens funding promised by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 from any school that develops, implements, facilitates, hosts or promotes any program or activity for, or provides or promotes literature or other materials to, children under the age of 18 that include “sexually oriented material” More on this, including a statement from American Library Association President Sam Helmick, can be found on the [ALA website](#).

On March 20, ALA filed an [amicus brief](#) intended to preserve broadband funding for libraries. The brief affirms the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) Universal Service Fund (USF) and one of its four programs, [E-Rate](#), which helps power broadband-enabled services and access through U.S. public libraries and schools. Filed in the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, the legal challenge threatens vital funding for broadband in the more than half of all public libraries that apply for E-Rate funding each year. More can be found on the [ALA website](#).

### Illinois Legislative Updates

I attended the Illinois Library Association (ILA) Public Policy Committee (PPC) meeting as Ex Officio on Monday, March 2. As you know, the ILA Executive Board has approved the following legislative priorities for this year:

- Increase Library System Area & Per Capita Grants and Public Per Capita & School District Grants by 20%
- Require Public Library Trustee Training
- Open Educational Resources funding grant
- Making eBooks Equitable and Accessible

Some new bills related to these priorities have begun to appear:

[HB4261](#) would increase annual grants for public libraries in the state, school library grants, and the library system grants by 20% in order to reflect inflationary pressures since the last time the grant amount was raised. The library system grant is what funds operations at RAILS and the other two systems in Illinois. The bill, which was filed by Rep. Martha Deuter, has bipartisan support with ten additional cosponsors as of the time of this writing. If passed, this bill would be effective immediately. This bill has not moved forward to a committee.

[HB3411](#) would appropriate \$3,000,000 from the General Revenue Fund to the Secretary of State for a recurring, permanent grant program for Illinois academic libraries. The grant would be applied to Open Educational Resources. This bill was filed by Rep Normal Hernandez and has seven co-sponsors. This bill has not moved forward to a committee.

[HB5236](#) (filed by Rep. Tracy Katz Muhl) would amend the Digital Library Protection Act to include more reasonable terms for libraries as it relates to eBook licenses. These provisions closely reflect those made in the [2025 legislation](#) passed in Connecticut. The bill now has seven cosponsors and will be presented at the Consumer Protection Committee on Tuesday, March 24. Leila Heath, Anna Behm, and myself have been working with larger group through the ILA Advocacy committee to ensure awareness and information related to this bill. I will be traveling to Springfield for the hearing on Tuesday and will report back more on that experience at our meeting on Friday.

ILA has published a [list of the bills](#) they are supporting, opposing, and monitoring on their website.

### **CARLI, IHLS, and RAILS Announce ILDS Change**

CARLI, IHLS, and RAILS announced a change to the Illinois Library Delivery Service (ILDS) turnaround time, moving from a 24-hour to a 48-hour expectation between delivery hubs in order to support long-term sustainability, operational efficiency, and safety across the statewide delivery network.

## ***Models best practices in equity, diversity, accessibility, and inclusion***

### **Accessibility and VPAT Repository**

ADA Title II web accessibility requirements for library web sites also extend to any paid or contracted electronic resource that the library provides. This includes databases, eBook platforms, calendar and registration systems, online catalogs, and other eResources.

For public libraries, school districts, and public academic institutions who serve populations of 50,000 or more, April 24, 2026 is the deadline for their web sites and electronic resources to meet the WCAG 2.1, Level AA standard. Smaller entities and special districts have until April 26, 2027. WCAG, or the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, is a set of standards that define accessibility requirements, such as heading structure, alt text, and captions for videos. Libraries are required to ensure that any content or mobile apps a vendor or contractor provides or posts on its behalf complies with WCAG 2.1 Level AA.

The RAILS Deals & Discounts team is working in the following ways to assist member libraries in working with vendors to ensure compliance:

#### *Advocacy with Vendors*

The Deals & Discounts team proactively shares the importance of accessibility requirements and advocates for compliance with RAILS partners and other vendors we talk to.

#### *Vendor Product Accessibility & VPATs*

- RAILS convened a working group of RAILS library staff to develop and maintain a VPAT repository.
- VPATs, or Voluntary Product Accessibility Templates, and the completed versions, called ACRs, or Accessibility Compliance Reports, aid in assessing how products meet standards.
- Over 350 products are represented in the RAILS VPAT repository and 55 libraries participate:  
<https://railslibraries.org/econtent/vpat/all>

*Resources for the Accessibility of eResources*

The Deals & Discounts team has compiled relevant resources to help libraries evaluate products and communicate with vendors.

- [ADA.gov: Working with Vendors](#)
- [Library Accessibility Alliance \(LAA\) Product Evaluations](#)
- [Sample Language for Contacting Vendors \(LAA\)](#)
- [BigTen Academic Alliance Sample Licensing Language](#)

***RAILS assists member libraries in preparing for the future***

**CCDNN Updates**

In February, the Cook County Digital Navigator Network team completed the task of awarding 23 libraries \$2,000 each. Funds were awarded specifically to libraries serving areas that are below average in key equity measures related to funding, technology availability, and underserved populations. Participating libraries' projects include purchasing hotspots and other devices to circulate, upgrading network infrastructures, implementing assistive technologies, training staff, and offering patron digital skills classes. In addition to providing an initial infusion of support where it's needed most, the Mini-Pilot is a prototype grant program that will help us learn what works, what doesn't, and how we can best support libraries in making impact in their communities.

The CCDNN team also began planning three in-person Digital Navigators: Library Listening & Learning Circles. These events were designed to help the team learn from library staff about the real challenges, barriers, and assets in their communities so that the team can best support their work helping residents access devices, reliable internet, and build essential digital skills.

We continue to be grateful for the support of the Cook County Digital Equity team and RAILS Director of Technology Services Anne Slaughter for their leadership in this area. Based on what we have seen so far with the Mini-Pilot program there is a lot of interest in these topics and a big need for our Cook County public libraries.

***Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community***

**ICOLC Conference in Orlando March 15-18**

I attended the ICOLC (International Coalition of Library Consortia) Annual conference in Orlando from March 15-18. There was a lot of great learning and information relevant to library consortia. I presented on a panel about continuing education offerings in multitype library environments.

**Joe Filapek to Participate in PPC Working Group on Trustee Training Legislation**

Joe Filapek will participate in an Illinois Library Association (ILA) Public Policy Committee Working Group that will review proposed legislation requiring annual public library trustee training in Illinois. This proposal is one of ILA's legislative priorities for the current year.

***Looking Ahead to April***

- **April Service of the Month and Board Development topics – RAILS Member Engagement Update with Jessica Silva and Sustainability in Libraries from Rebecca Miller**



## This Month at RAILS – March 2026

### THE TOP THREE

In response to board member feedback, each month we provide brief talking points to help you spread the word about specific RAILS programs/services. Here are this month's top three:

#### **RAILS Awards Nine Continuing Education Event Grants**

RAILS CE Event Grants fund workshops and training open to all member libraries. Nine libraries and networking groups received a combined \$15,535 in funding this cycle:

- **College of DuPage & DePaul University Libraries** - Illinois Information Literacy Summit
- **East Moline Public Library** - Actively Anti-Racist Service to Leisure Readers
- **Resource Sharing Alliance** - RSA Day 2026
- **Bradley Public Library District** - Readers' Advisory Recharge
- **LIRE Rockford** - The Librarians Screening & Panel Discussion at Nordlof Center
- **ERLE** - Supporting Emergent Readers: Material Evaluation and Literacy Solutions
- **Chicago Public Schools Libraries Team** - CPS Librarians Back-to-School Retreat
- **Kankakee Public Library** - Meeting People Where They Are: Human-centered Service in Today's Libraries
- **Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science** - Drawn Together: Building Empathy & Compassion through Graphic Medicine

#### **RAILS Member Meetup at Black Hawk College**

Jessica hosted a RAILS Member Meetup on February 3 at Black Hawk College in Moline, IL (pictured, right). There were 13 librarians in attendance. We discussed RAILS resources, Black Hawk's library organization and their My Library Is... project.



#### **Chicago Tribune Digital**

##### **Access Discounts for RAILS Public Libraries**

*Chicago Tribune* digital access subscriptions and discounts are now open for any RAILS public library who wishes to join. The digital subscription provides full access to the [chicagotribune.com](http://chicagotribune.com) site and digital replica editions of the current few months of newspapers. The RAILS group purchase runs July 1 – June 30, and new subscribers who join by May 1, 2026 will get free early access.

## Provides leadership in ensuring sustainable, equitable resource sharing

### Enhance sharing of knowledge and best practices

#### February RAILS Site Visits

RAILS Member Engagement Manager Jessica Silva conducted one site visit at a RAILS member library in February. She visited:

- North Park Elementary School, Chicago, IL (pictured, right)

To learn more about these visits, see our site visit map, or to request a visit, please visit the [RAILS Library Site Visits page](#).

#### RAILS Participates in Kane County Institute Day

RAILS Member Engagement Specialist Jessica Silva presented at Kane County Institute Day on February 27 about RAILS resources and Illinois library resources. Eight Kane County educators participated.

#### RAILS Named #LibraryOfTheDay by Angela Hursh

RAILS was named the #LibraryOfTheDay by Angela Hursh [on LinkedIn](#) for our Library Logo breakdown series, created by RAILS Administrative Assistant Gwen Gemmill. Angela called the series a “great source of inspiration” for libraries considering a brand update.

#### New *Can't Shelve This*: “If We Build It, They Will Read”

In [episode 2.7](#) of *Can't Shelve This*, Janette and Leah are joined by Pernille Ripp (Dagmarskolen, Denmark) and Dr. Sarah Sansbury from DeKalb School District, Georgia. Together, they explore reading identity, student choice, and how to create conditions that invite kids into reading.

#### RAILS Social Media Engagement

See the report at the end for info on our March social media engagement efforts.



### Leverage economies of scale to provide greater purchasing power

RAILS members can find information, trial access and pricing on all deals and discounts by logging into the [RAILS Deals & Discounts page](#).

#### April 1 and July 1 Renewals

This is a busy time of year both finalizing April 1 and launching July 1 renewals. The team is currently working on renewals for the following group purchases:

- April 1 Renewals: Fiero Code, Hiveclass, LOTE4Kids/Era Books Online, ReadSquared
- July 1 Renewals: ALA RDA Toolkit, Chicago Tribune Digital, EBSCO Supplemental Resources, HR Source, JSTOR, Pressreader

**Vendor Webinars**

Webinar Title	Date	Registered	Attended
ReadSquared Reading Programs for Public Libraries	2/5/2026	8	2
LOTE4Kids: Storytime in Their Language	2/10/2026	14	9
Fiero Code: Coding Education for Public Libraries	2/11/2026	2	0
Communico: Platform Overview for RAILS Libraries	2/12/2026	11	8
Quill Supply & Furniture Discounts for RAILS Libraries	2/26/2026	14	8
<b>Totals</b>		<b>49</b>	<b>27</b>

**Online High School Programs**

RAILS offers two online high school programs for libraries: Career Online High School (implemented Spring 2016) and Gale Excel (implemented Spring 2024). Stats for both programs are listed below:

**Career Online High School Stats as of February 28, 2026**

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
527	290	61	63%/53%

**Gale Excel Stats as of February 28, 2026**

Scholarships Awarded	Total Graduates	Current Number of Students in Program	RAILS Graduation Rate/National Rate
74	37	34	93%/53%

**Seek greater efficiencies, innovations, and enhancements to delivery services**

**CTL Acquired by Best Courier**

RAILS recently learned that our outsourced delivery service provider, Continental Transportation Services (CTS), has been acquired by Best Courier of Vernon Hills. At this time, no operational changes are expected and the company has indicated it will continue meeting all service obligations under the contract signed in 2025. Members of the new leadership team recently visited the RAILS Bolingbrook delivery hub to receive an overview of our delivery operation.

**RAILS Staff Attend Automated Material Handler Demonstration**

RAILS Associate Executive Director Joe Filapek, Director of Facilities and Delivery Mark Hatch, and Delivery Services Manager Demond Warfield met with staff at the Chicago Public Library – Harold Washington Library Center on March 20 to observe a demonstration of the library’s automated material handler and learn more about how automation supports high-volume materials processing.

**Work collaboratively to identify and support shared catalog solutions and expand resource sharing**

**Find More Illinois Update**

On February 11, Cooperative Computer Services (CCS) voted to continue their membership in FMI for 3 more years. Their participation provides a crucial foundation for this program and RAILS appreciates their efforts and leadership.



On February 19, Director of Library Resources and Programs Leila Heath and Consortial Services Supervisor Barb Miller met with Grayslake Area Public Library District staff to discuss their experience using FMI. Miller also met with staff from Glenview Public Library and McHenry Public Library District on February 23. Their feedback provides valuable insights as we continue to build the statewide program.

On February 6, Barb Miller met with representatives from WISCAT to further discuss resource sharing with FMI.

**Libraries Participating in Find More Illinois as of February 28, 2026**

Academic	Public	School	Special	Total
9	71	12	1	93

**Find More Illinois total transactions (loans and borrows)**

Time Period	Number of transactions
February 2026	1,567
Fiscal Year to Date	11,438

**Find More Illinois catalog**

Time Period	Number of items in shared catalog
February 2026	9,011,957

**Find More Illinois Demos/Reviews**

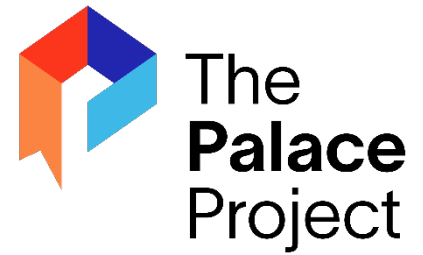
Date of Training	Library	Number of Participants
February 10 Demo	Havana PLD	1
February 4 Training	Richard A. Mautino PL (new staff)	1
February 12 Training	Richard A. Mautino PL (new staff)	2
February 25 Training	Ohio PLD (new staff)	1

**eRead Illinois & Inkie.org Update**

RAILS Director of Library Resources and Programs Leila Heath and RAILS E-Content Specialist Anna Behm met regularly with the team from Palace Project to discuss progress with onboarding libraries and transferring the eRead Illinois collection to the Palace Project.



Anna Behm gave a presentation to Plainfield CCSD 202 school library professionals about eRead Illinois and the transition from Boundless to The Palace Project on February 13. Thirty school buildings in the district participate in eRead Illinois.



Anna Behm gave a presentation about eRead Illinois and the transition from Boundless to The Palace Project at SD U-46's Parapalooza event on February 27. Thirty-five people attended the presentation over three sessions.

**eRead Illinois Checkouts**

Time Period	E-Books	Audiobooks	Total
February 2026	8,617	8,918	17,535
Fiscal Year to Date	106,297	109,499	215,796
Since Palace Project Migration	23,679	24,921	48,600

**Inkie.org Library Views**

Time Period	Number of Views
February 2026	1,169
Fiscal Year to Date	12,706

**Explore More Illinois Update**

In February 2026, 2,432 reservations were made in Explore More Illinois. The most popular downstate and suburban attractions in February 2026 were:



- Morton Arboretum in Lisle (93)
- Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe (73)
- DuPage Children’s Museum in Naperville (63)
- Griffin Museum of Science and Industry (61)
- Chicago Children’s Museum (43)

The most popular Chicago attractions in February 2026 were:

- Art Institute of Chicago (404)
- Field Museum (328)
- Chicago Academy of Sciences Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum (320)
- Griffin Museum of Science and Industry (226)

- Chicago Botanic Garden in Glencoe (126)

In February, Explore More Illinois welcomed the Northbrook Symphony.

**Libraries Enrolled in Explore More Illinois as of March 1, 2026**

System	Publics	Community Colleges	Total
RAILS	351	3	354
IHLS	110	1	111
CPL	1	n/a	1
Totals	462	4	466

**Attractions in Explore More Illinois as of March 1, 2026**

Attractions	63
Total Attractions in 2025	83

**Reservations Made in Explore More Illinois in February 2026**

Organization	February 2026
RAILS/IHLS	539
CPL	1,893
Total	2,432

*Assist member libraries in preparing for the future*

**Future-focused professional development and member engagement efforts**

**February CE Highlights**

In February two continuing education events drew record attendance, highlighting the need for ongoing technology training for member libraries. On February 3, “Document Accessibility Essentials: A Step-by-Step Guide from Word to PDF” had 315 registrants and covered foundational document accessibility techniques in Microsoft Word and PDF formats, including heading structures, alt text, table formatting, and accessibility checking. 371 member library staff registered for “Getting the Most Out of Canva Pro” on February 11. One attendee reported that this event was “easily one of the most informative RAILS webinars I’ve attended.”

**Directors University Advanced, 4/28-30**

31 RAILS directors will participate in this 3-day event, co-sponsored by RAILS, ILA, and IHLS, to dive deeper into topics affecting directors today. This event takes place April 28-30 in Grafton, IL. Participants include directors from the following libraries:

- Alpha Park Public Library District
- Carlock Public Library District

- Dominy Memorial Library
- Ela Area Public Library District
- Four Star Public Library District
- Glenview Public Library
- Graves-Hume Public Library District
- Greig Memorial Library
- Illinois Prairie District Public Library
- Lake Forest Library
- Marengo-Union Library District
- Martin Township Public Library
- Matteson Area Public Library District
- Normal Public Library
- North Chicago Public Library
- Palos Heights Public Library
- Parlin-Ingersoll Public Library
- Peotone Public Library District
- Pittsfield Public Library District
- Polo Public Library District
- Prairie Skies Public Library District
- River Valley District Library
- Riverdale Public Library District
- Robert R. Jones Public Library District
- Robert W. Rowe Public Library District
- Rolling Meadows Library
- Roselle Public Library District
- Stockton Township Public Library
- Thornton Public Library
- Town and Country Public Library District
- Williamsfield Public Library District

#### Recent CE Events

- **“Using Storytelling for Advocacy: A Guide for School Librarians”**, webinar, February 23
- **“Official RDA: What’s New & Different”**, webinar, February 24
- **RAILS Catalyst Online Session #5**, online meeting, March 19
- **“AI Safety Training Parts 1 & 2”**, webinars series, March 11, March 18, and March 25
- **“Leading Through Change”**, webinar, March 16

#### Upcoming CE Events

- **“LGBTQ+ Inclusive Schools and Libraries”**, webinar, March 19  
Learn how to effectively support LGBTQ students, families, educators, and librarians by fostering affirming environments in schools and libraries.
- **“Adult Programming from Start to Finish”**, webinar, March 23  
Learn the basics of adult programming from start to finish, including finding speakers, handling contracts and negotiations, and tips for staying organized. Discuss the challenges of accessibility, formats, and budgets, and talk about what makes a “good” program.
- **RAILS Catalyst Online Session #6**, online meeting, April 14  
In the last RAILS Catalyst online session, participants will continue learning how to lead across their organizations.
- **“Passive Readers Advisory”**, webinar, April 14  
Learn how to help patrons find their next great read with passive readers’ advisory tools such as book displays, bookmarks, shelf talkers and lists. Learn the features that guide patrons with specific needs and wants while also marketing your collection.
- **LACONI Recharge & RAILS Present: “I Found a Grant. Now What?”**, webinar, April 16  
Learn what to do when you find a grant, the key components of a grant, what tools you need to complete the application, and how to ensure you are meeting the requirements.

## *Leads alongside member libraries to develop and strengthen Illinois library community*

### Strengthen collaborative relationships with partner library organizations

#### March Partnership Meetings

RAILS has monthly meetings with representatives from the Association of Illinois School Library Educators (AISLE), Chicago Public Schools (CPS), Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS), Illinois Library Association (ILA), and the Illinois State Library (ISL) to discuss ways we can work collaboratively to support school libraries.

In March, the group discussed:

- School Library Advocacy Through Education (SLATE) update
- Recent federal legislation including a bill (HR 7661) that would give legislators the power to ban certain books
- State legislation including ILA's e-book bill (HB 5236)
- Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) update
- Illinois School Library Workers Symposium (ISLWS) update

And much more! We will continue to keep the board updated on these meetings.

## RAILS Staff & Service Center News

#### Joe Filapek Elected to LIMRICC Board

RAILS Associate Executive Director Joe Filapek was elected to serve a four-year term on The Library Insurance Management and Risk Control Combination (LIMRICC) Board of Directors. Joe will step into this role as RAILS Finance Director Sharon Swanson concludes her term on the LIMRICC board.

#### Jessica Silva Presents at 2026 IHLS Member Day

Jessica Silva presented with Public Library Liaison Kate Kite at Illinois Heartland Library System (IHLS) Member Day virtual event on February 19. Jessica and Kate shared information about the importance of creating L2 accounts and how to use L2 to build reports. There were 105 attendees.

#### Can't Shelve This Crew Presents at IHLS Member Day

RAILS Data Analyst Janette Derucki, IHLS Director of Membership and Outreach Leah Gregory, and RAILS Digital Marketing & Communications Specialist Ola Gronski presented "So You Want to Start a Podcast..." on February 19 at IHLS's Member Day. The session explored how libraries can create their own successful podcasts on a low-to-no budget.

#### Leah Heath Attends 2026 ER&L Conference

RAILS Director of Library Resources and Programs of Leila Heath attended the Electronic Resources & Libraries (ER&L) Conference in Austin, TX from March 1-4. Highlights included sessions on e-resource cycles and maintenance, accessibility, AI, and other e-resource issues. There were also opportunities to meet and network with consortium leaders, librarians and vendors.

**Kortni Springer and Maggie Thomann Participate in 2026 Electronic Resources Minnesota Conference**

RAILS Library Resource Specialists Kortni Springer and Maggie Thomann attended the presentation From A to C: Accessibility language in licenses by Sunshine Carter from University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. The presentation covered ways to include accessibility language in licensing contracts and how the University of Minnesota approached navigating this with their vendors.

**RAILS IT Update**

In February, the RAILS IT team extended the value of retired hardware by preparing older laptops for lab use. The team also reviewed cyber security software options. The team renewed with CrowdStrike. IT worked on secure password-management planning, balance auditability (with RAILS Finance), and separation of duties. The team visited Northern Illinois University and tested the Zoom Video Conference unit in preparation for the RAILS Board meeting in April.

# JANUARY 2026

## FOLLOWERS

*total subscribers*



Facebook +41  
**2,969**



Instagram +16  
**1,813**



LinkedIn +33  
**2,336**

## REACH

*accounts shown our content*

Facebook +8,361  
**13,650**

Instagram +2,331  
**3,350**

LinkedIn +200  
**2,538**

## VIEWS

*times our content was seen*

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LinkedIn +666  
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## ENGAGEMENT

*reactions, comments, and shares*

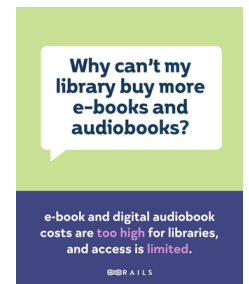
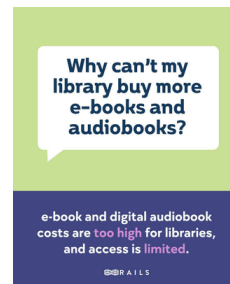
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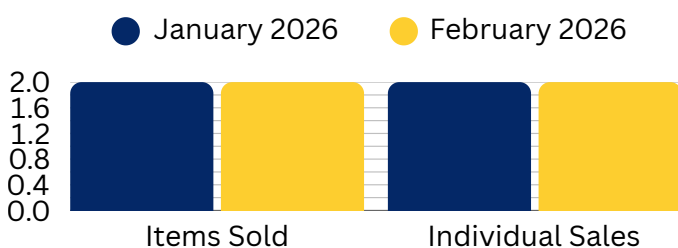
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## TOP POST

*received the most engagement*



## RAILS Online Store



**RAILS Minute Views: 486**

**Can't Shelve This Listens: 1,531**