

Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers

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May-June 2015 Newsletter

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Amtrak

National Happenings

On May 12, 2015, an Amtrak Northeast Regional train from Washington, D.C. bound for New York City derailed and crashed near Philadelphia. Of the 238 passengers and 5 crew on board, 8 were killed and over 200 injured, 11 critically. The train was traveling at 102 mph into a 50 mph zone of curved tracks when it derailed. Some of the passengers had to be extricated from the crashed cars, and many of the passengers and local residents helped first responders during the rescue operation. The Pennsylvania Railroad had years ago set up an Automatic Train Stop (ATS) system of relays to keep trains from running past stop signals, and Amtrak had modified the system over the years to prevent overspeed, but this particular northbound section of the curve did not have the ATS system in place. The southbound curve was protected by ATS but not the northbound curve. Amtrak is installing its new positive train control system from Washington to Boston but had not yet implemented it on that part of the railroad.

The Philadelphia derailment set off a political battle in Washington over Amtrak funding. Generally Democrats were saying that since Amtrak is so chronically underfunded that a breakdown in infrastructure was responsible for the derailment, while Republicans were saying that human error (operator of the train) was the cause. The reality is the truth is probably somewhere in the middle as Amtrak's Northeast Corridor is undercapitalized by about \$1 billion per year – forcing Amtrak to make difficult choices on which safety programs to fund, along with the operator of the train trying to take a sharp curve at twice the speed limit. If the lack of funding was responsible at all it didn't stop the GOP in the House from cutting Amtrak's budget by \$242 million from what they received last year. Amtrak's budget was cut by the House along with several other infrastructure programs (except for highways, of course), but the good news is that several specific anti-Amtrak amendments were defeated. Rep. Mo Brooks (R-Al) offered two amendments that sought to eliminate Amtrak's operating and capital grants, and another amendment by Rep. Pete Sessions (R-Tx) to end the *Sunset Limited* between New Orleans and Los Angeles. The Sessions amendment was opposed by Reps. Cedric Richmond, D-New Orleans and Charles Boustany, R-Lafayette. Voting for it were Reps. Steve Scalise, R-Jefferson, John Fleming, R-Minden, Ralph Abraham, R-Alto., and Garret Graves, R-Baton Rouge. Rep. Boustany has a history of not voting favorably for Amtrak, but the last couple of votes he has been voting favorably. News coming out the Senate was much better with the Commerce Committee approving \$1.4 billion for Amtrak for FY16 (about what they got in FY15). It's hoped that funding on the Senate side can be increased even more – there was an amendment in the committee for Sen. Chris Coons (D-Del) to increase funding to \$2 billion, but it failed. President Obama had threatened to veto the entire Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development (THUD) bill because the spending levels were too low, so perhaps that motivated the Senate Commerce Committee to increase funding.

Amtrak National Business Performance

For just the long-distance business segment, ridership was down in March by 2.1% compared to last year due to with nearly all trains showing decreases. April's long-distance ridership was down again by 4.2% compared with all trains showing decreases (except the CITY of New Orleans).

Time Period	Passenger Totals	% +/- Last Year	Ticket Revenue	% +/- Last Year	Cost Recov. %	Recov. % Last Year	Employee Total
Mar 15	2.68M	+3.9%	\$188.6M	+3.9%	94%	91%	20,351
Apr 15	2.62M	+1.1%	\$193.8M	+3.9%	101%	103%	20,477

The chart above highlights totals for all of Amtrak's business units. M stands for million.

Amtrak Regional Business Performance

Detailed performance statistics for Louisiana regional trains. M stands for millions.

Time Period	<i>City of New Orleans</i>	<i>Crescent</i>	<i>Sunset Limited</i>	<i>Texas Eagle</i>
Mar 15 Riders	23,176	22,447	9,529	32,024
Mar 15 Rider % +/- last year	+0.3%	-12.7%	+4.7%	+2.8%
Mar 15 Revenue	\$1.73M	\$2.49M	\$1.02M	\$2.24M
Mar 15 Revenue +/- last year	-6.4%	-8.3%	+0.9%	-4.7%
Apr 15 Riders	20,931	24,037	7,770	23,622
Apr 15 Rider % +/- last year	+2.9%	-2.3%	-6.4%	-5.4%
Apr 15 Revenue	\$1.59M	\$2.72M	\$0.89M	\$1.79M
Apr 15 Revenue +/- last year	-0.6%	-3.3%	-8.0%	-9.9%

The *Crescent's* ridership was down in March because one of its four coaches was removed to cut costs, along with the Florida trains (these trains all showed ridership declines in the 9-13% range). For April, all of the trains did less business than last year with the exception of the *CITY of New Orleans*.

On-Time Performance

The On-Time performance for the entire Amtrak system was 69.6% for March and 73.8% for April.

Route Name	Mar15 OT%	Apr15 OT%
<i>CITY of New Orleans</i>	58.1%	68.3%
<i>Crescent</i>	56.5%	45.0%
<i>Sunset Limited</i>	40.7%	48.0%
<i>Texas Eagle</i>	16.1%	28.3%

The on-time performance goal for Amtrak's long-distance trains is 80%. All of the March regional trains performed about the same as last year, and the April train performance was significantly worse for all trains (except for the CITY of New Orleans).

Odds and Ends

- LARP now has an active Facebook page that is growing in followers – “Like” us on Facebook to get rapid notification of news. Our website *LARPrail.com* has also been updated recently and you can now safely **pay your dues on the website**. Check both our Facebook page and the website frequently and get up-to-date information on meeting times, notices, and blog posts.
- All Aboard Florida is estimating to carry over 5 million passengers and generate nearly \$300 million in revenue by 2020, and will capture about 10% of the overall travel market between Orlando and Miami once the service is fully operating. The company plans to run 16 daily frequencies in this corridor by mid-2018.
- The Southern Rail Commission held a meeting in Biloxi on June 17 to discuss bringing back passenger rail service from New Orleans to Orlando with many local officials, business leaders and civic leaders in attendance. The Southern Rail Commission has applied for a grant that would allow funds to support a final report to recommend a passenger rail service from New Orleans to Orlando. Wouldn't it be nice if we could get language inserted into Amtrak's funding bill requiring them to run the train?



Illinois Central's southbound "Panama Limited" running along Lake Pontchartrain in the 1960s.

2015 LARP Officers

John Sita, Jr. President; **John Turner** Vice-President, **Louis Bangma** Secretary/Treasurer

Dues were payable January 1, 2015.

Join the Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers and help reconnect our cities by passenger rail once again. Your membership helps LARP advocate for trains and also entitles you to receive a subscription to our newsletter. LARP is a non-profit consumer organization supported solely by yearly dues and contributions of its members. The next regular meeting will be **10:00 a.m., Saturday, July 11**, at New Orleans Union Passenger Terminal, 1001 Loyola Avenue.



LARP Membership Application

☐ Single member \$20 ☐ Family Member \$30

Name _____

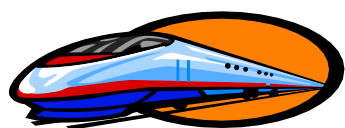
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☐ I can work actively for LARP. Please contact me.

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