

# *Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers*

P.O. Box 6231 New Orleans, LA 70174-6231  
www.LARPrail.com

## November-December 2015 Newsletter

John Sita, Jr.—Editor  
[jsitajr@cox.net](mailto:jsitajr@cox.net)

### Amtrak

#### National Happenings

The Republican led Congress passed a good transportation authorization bill (FAST) – Fixing America’s Transportation Act that included passenger rail for the first time. A couple of weeks later Congress passed a \$1.1 trillion Omnibus bill that funded the entire federal government for FY 2016 through September of next year. It included \$57.6 billion in transportation funding, with Amtrak receiving \$1.39 billion, divided between \$288.5 million in operations and \$1.1 billion in capital. Amtrak received \$1.4 billion in FY 2015, and while they got about the same as last year, Amtrak funding could have been much worse given the ferocity of Amtrak’s enemies in Congress. The budget also provided \$500 million for National Infrastructure Investment grants (replacement for TIGER) with this competitive grant being used to fund passenger and freight rail projects. For transit users, Congress increased the mass transit commuter tax benefit to \$250/month, bringing transit into parity with parking tax benefits. New transit starts are \$2.18 billion.

#### Amtrak National Business Performance

Amtrak’s FY15 ridership ending in September was 30.8 million with revenue of \$2.185 billion, both down 0.1% from the previous fiscal year. Amtrak’s cost recovery was 91.1% with operating losses of \$306.5 million for the fiscal year, higher than the previous fiscal year.

Time Period	Passenger Totals	% +/- Last Year	Ticket Revenue	% +/- Last Year	Cost Recov. %	Recov. % Last Year	Employee Total
Sep 15	2.47M	-1.9%	\$172.5M	-3.9%	92%	85%	20,424
Oct 15	2.64M	-2.4%	\$189.4M	-2.4%	103%	101%	20,565

The chart above highlights totals for all of Amtrak’s business units. M stands for million. September ridership total was down 2% compared to last September, NEC ridership was down 3%, and state supported and long distance ridership were both down 1%. October ridership was down 2% compared to October of last year, with the NEC down 1%, state corridors down 3%, and long distance down 6%. In October, there were several service disruptions affecting the Florida trains and the *Texas Eagle*.

## 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>
Sept 15 Riders	20,073	22,075	7,032	22,614
Sept 15 Rider % +/- last year	+0.7%	-0.9%	-2.1%	-4.6%
Sept 15 Revenue	\$1.42M	\$2.31M	\$0.77M	\$1.61M
Sept 15 Revenue +/- last year	-2.2%	-4.5%	-6.2%	-15.0%
Oct 15 Riders	22,175	22,563	7,655	21,187
Oct 15 Rider % +/- last year	+2.3%	-6.6%	-10.2%	-18.2%
Oct 15 Revenue	\$1.56M	\$2.4M	\$0.85M	\$1.64M
Oct 15 Revenue +/- last year	-4.6%	-10.0%	-14.3%	-20.3%

In October, the *Sunset Limited* and *Texas Eagle* was negatively impacted by trackwork, and the *Crescent* was impacted by flooding in the southeast.

## On-Time Performance

The On-Time performance for the entire Amtrak system was 75.8% for September and 77.6% for October.

Route Name	Sept15 OT%	Oct15 OT%
<i>CITY of New Orleans</i>	63.4%	90.3%
<i>Crescent</i>	55.0%	46.8%
<i>Sunset Limited</i>	57.9%	76.9%
<i>Texas Eagle</i>	20.1%	30.6%

The on-time performance goal for Amtrak's long-distance trains is 80%.

## Baton Rouge/Florida

Incoming Louisiana House Speaker Walt Leger attended our December meeting and spoke highly of the New Orleans to Baton Rouge train. Leger sees the Baton Rouge train as being an integral part of making the city pairs into a "super region" that will be able to better compete with Atlanta and Houston. He said that the train would help to increase mobility and also to help alleviate traffic on I-10 and would be transformative to the region. Incoming governor John Bel Edwards also was reported mentioning the Baton Rouge train before a group of business leaders, saying, "It doesn't just get traffic off of our Interstates and our roads: it makes us into a super region." Leger said that Edwards won't be opposed to asking the federal government for the \$262 million needed in capital costs to implement the passenger train service.

For the Florida train, the recent transportation bill passed by Congress allows for the creation of a Gulf Coast rail working group, which will be allocated up to \$500,000 per year to study needs in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. The bill offers a \$90 million to \$500 million grant opportunity for capital improvements for stations, as well as grants for assistance in operating expenses for new lines for three years. However, any money awarded would be subject to appropriations by Congress. As far as options for restoration are concerned, the Southern Rail Commission is looking at five options: Alternative A, extension of the *City of New Orleans* to Orlando plus an additional New Orleans to Mobile round trip; Alternative A1, *City of New Orleans* extension to Orlando without the Mobile round trip; Alternative B, two daily round trips from New Orleans to Mobile; Alternative B1, two daily New Orleans to Mobile round trips, with one extended to Jacksonville via a Thruway bus; and Alternative C, a New Orleans to Orlando overnight stand-alone train. Alternative A would produce the highest passenger miles, ridership, and ticket revenue, but would require dividing nearly \$10 million in operating support among Louisiana,

Mississippi, and Alabama (for the Mobile round trip). Alternative A would be preferred because it provides the most service, but it will require buy in from localities along the route and the three states to provide financial support.

## 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.
- Louisiana’s new Transportation Secretary will be Shawn Wilson. He comes into the position highly regarded and it’s hoped that Wilson will make passenger rail a priority. LARP will be contacting him soon.
- The *City of New Orleans* was disrupted at the end of December due to flooding between Memphis and Carbondale on the Mississippi River. The trains are turning at Carbondale and Memphis with a bus bridge in between, and as the high water moves south Memphis will probably also become unreachable by rail.
- Union Pacific is starting a trackwork project in mid-January that will require a change in schedule for the eastbound *Sunset Limited*. Eastbound train #2 will depart Los Angeles at 4 p.m. and arrive New Orleans at 4:30 p.m. The project is expected to take between three and six months. Also, expect Monday thru Thursday closures of the *Crescent* route between New Orleans and Atlanta in January and into February (NS maintenance blitz), with no bus alternatives provided. Mardi Gras is early this year (February 9) and it’s hoped that the NS track projects will be completed in time.



A Southern Railway excursion being led by 2-8-2 #4501 storming north through Purvis, MS, in November, 1974.

## 2015 LARP Officers

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

***Dues are payable January 1, 2016.***

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, January 9**, at New Orleans Union Passenger Terminal, 1001 Loyola Avenue.



### LARP Membership Application

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

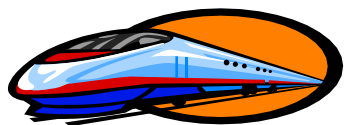
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☐ I can work actively for LARP. Please contact me.

MAIL TO:    Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers  
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