

Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers

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

January-February Newsletter

John Sita, Jr.—Editor
jsitajr@cox.net

Amtrak

National Happenings

Amtrak requested \$1.8 billion from Congress in FY17, including \$1.205 billion for the national system and \$613 million for the northeast corridor. That's about \$400,000 more than what they actually received in FY16. The FY17 request is the amount that was fully authorized in the FAST Act. Amtrak probably has a better chance of getting a fully-authorized appropriation from the Senate than from the House as the House has recently been funding Amtrak at very low levels while the Senate at much higher levels. An amount of \$1.8 billion would be about only 1/3 of what the FAA gets in taxpayer general funds (not including the ticket tax), and about 15% of general fund highway funding (not including the gas tax). Perhaps we can get some southern senators to agree to full funding for Amtrak (that would not otherwise) if a gulf coast train is part of the deal.

Amtrak has told its employees in a memo that it's having a cash flow problem. The company has initiated cuts and a hiring freeze, and has canceled its National Train Day celebration this year. Ridership is down across the network because of low gas prices, contributing to Amtrak's cash flow shortage.

Amtrak National Business Performance

Time Period	Passenger Totals	% +/- Last Year	Ticket Revenue	% +/- Last Year	Cost Recov. %	Recov. % Last Year	Employee Total
Nov 15	2.65M	-0.7%	\$196.0M	-0.1%	103%	110%	20,584
Dec 15	2.59M	-2.8%	\$187.2M	-3.9%	105%	104%	20,512

The chart above highlights totals for all of Amtrak's business units. M stands for million. November ridership and revenue were both down from the previous year.

Service Disruptions

The *City of New Orleans* was really hammered in January and February due to flooding and the closing of the Bonnet Carre Spillway Bridge, and then the burning/closing of that same bridge a couple of weeks later. Amtrak operated a bus from Jackson to New Orleans while the train wasn't running. The *Sunset Limited* eastbound train 2 has been operating on a modified schedule several hours earlier, and the *Crescent* had its usual Monday through Thursday closures due to track work (Amtrak did operate a bus alternative from Atlanta to New Orleans). There were days in late January and into February when NOUPT was empty of trains.

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>
Nov 15 Riders	20,938	24,890	8,658	25,512
Nov 15 Rider % +/- last year	+1.6%	+2.4%	-1.8%	-6.1%
Nov 15 Revenue	\$1.59M	\$2.67M	\$0.96M	\$1.84M
Nov 15 Revenue +/- last year	+0.7%	-6.3%	-4.9%	-12.4%
Dec 15 Riders	21,421	26,695	9,064	27,088
Dec 15 Rider % +/- last year	-1.2%	+4.1%	-3.7%	-9.7%
Dec 15 Revenue	\$1.64M	\$2.86M	\$1.04M	\$2.13M
Dec 15 Revenue +/- last year	-1.2%	-8.8%	-6.9%	-14.2%

In November, regional ridership was basically flat while revenue was down mostly across the board. Flooding in December negatively impacted the *City of New Orleans* and the *Texas Eagle*.

On-Time Performance

The On-Time performance for the entire Amtrak system was 74.6% for November and 83.2% for December.

Route Name	Nov15 OT%	Dec15 OT%
<i>CITY of New Orleans</i>	85.0%	90.3%
<i>Crescent</i>	48.3%	53.2%
<i>Sunset Limited</i>	73.1%	80.8%
<i>Texas Eagle</i>	41.7%	67.7%

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

Baton Rouge/Florida

Governor John Bel Edwards has recently been talking very positively about the Baton Rouge train. At a Port of New Orleans ceremony marking the completion of ARRA-funded projects, he mentioned the Baton Rouge train and the need to build New Orleans and Baton Rouge into a super region with the train as a way to connect the two cities. Vice President Joe Biden attended the ceremony as well (he administered the ARRA), and he said that, "he wished he could still give us the \$300 million bucks for the train that the previous guy turned down," a reference to Jindal turning down the ARRA funding for the train. Also, Louisiana DOT&D Secretary Shawn Wilson has also been saying positive things about the Baton Rouge train and the super region.

In mid-February Amtrak and the Southern Rail Commission operated an inspection train from New Orleans to Jacksonville. Although its stated purpose was to test the CSX track, the train really had all the pomp of an inaugural run, complete with many prominent politicians. Among those on board were Senator Roger Wicker (R-Mississippi), Governor Phil Bryant (R-Mississippi), members of Congress Cedric Richmond and Corinne Brown, numerous mayors, transportation officials, and the press. Hundreds of people turned out at each of the former stations – and at some places where Amtrak didn't formerly stop – with Tallahassee perhaps with the biggest turnout of over 1,000 people. Both Republican and Democratic politicians have taken notice of the strong support for the restoration of train service, and along with the Gulf Coast Working Group meeting regularly it should only be a matter of time before service is restored. What officials want to bring back is an overnight extension of the City of New Orleans train to Orlando, along with a state-supported New Orleans to Mobile train.

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.
- Amtrak has been doing a lot of track work in/around NOUPT lately. Amtrak maintains not only the station tracks but out to Carrollton Avenue and the spurs both to the CN track past the 17th Street Canal and to the Norfolk Southern track near First Baptist Church. Amtrak has replaced all of its rail with welded rail, and (so far) one station track has concrete ties. These tracks are in better shape than they have been in years.



Amtrak's Gulf Coast Inspection train leaving Amtrak property and entering the Norfolk Southern track near First Baptist Church of New Orleans, shortly after departing NOUPT February 18.

2016 LARP Officers

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

Dues were 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, March 12**, at New Orleans Union Passenger Terminal, 1001 Loyola Avenue.



LARP Membership Application

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

Name _____

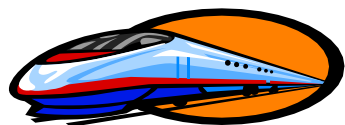
Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

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

MAIL TO: Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers
 P.O. Box 6231
 New Orleans, LA 70174-6231



Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers

P.O. Box 6231 New Orleans, LA 70174-6231

**Address Service
Requested**