

Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers

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March-April Newsletter

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Amtrak

National Happenings

The US Senate Appropriations Committee passed a transportation budget that will increase Amtrak's FY17 budget to \$1.7 billion, or \$76 million more than what was approved in FY16. The Senate Committee also approved \$525 million for TIGER (\$25 million more than last year), and \$2.3 billion for Capital Investment Grants (New Starts). If approved, the increase in Amtrak funding could allow for additional funds to be expended on returning service from New Orleans to Florida. The next steps will be for the full Senate to pass a budget bill and then the House to do the same, and then the two bodies come together in conference to decide a final amount, and then the President to sign the bill into law. However, election years have a tendency to reduce the amount of work that comes out of Congress, and it would not be surprising if a budget did not pass this year. Even though the House supposedly has a budget agreement in place for FY17, many conservatives don't like it and may block attempts to pass the actual Appropriations bills. If Congress can't pass a budget likely what will happen would be another series of Continuing Resolutions to extend government programs (including Amtrak) for a specified period of time, usually at the previous-year level.

GOP presidential candidate Donald Trump has been reported saying some positive things about high-speed rail. He was quoted as saying, "They (China) have trains that go 300 miles per hour. We have trains that go chug ...chug ... chug." Trump has also been saying that infrastructure investment, although expensive, would help to stimulate the economy. It will be interesting to see what specific policy proposal that Trump brings forth concerning passenger rail. If Trump does call for passenger rail investment of taxpayer dollars he would be the only Republican running for president to do so. On the Democratic side, Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders have both been long-time supporters of high-speed rail and conventional Amtrak service as well.

Amtrak National Business Performance

Time Period	Passenger Totals	% +/- Last Year	Ticket Revenue	% +/- Last Year	Cost Recov. %	Recov. % Last Year	Employee Total
Jan 16	2.18M	-0.6%	\$143.7M	-2.9%	108%	103%	20,492
Feb 16	2.22M	+2.3%	\$148.5M	-0.5%	110%	109%	20,694

The chart above highlights totals for all of Amtrak's business units. M stands for million. Low gasoline prices continued to negatively impact Amtrak ridership, as well as weather-related service disruptions. In January,

overall ridership was down 1% compared to the previous year with revenue down 3%. In February, overall ridership was up 2% compared to the previous year with revenue down 1%.

Service Disruptions

The *City of New Orleans* continued to be impacted in March by the Bonnet Carre bridge closure, and finally the route was fully open mid month. Flooding also impacted the *Sunset Limited* route in western Louisiana with the line shut down for several days.

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>
Jan 16 Riders	15,376	15,816	6,871	16,312
Jan 16 Rider % +/- last year	-14.3%	-3.4%	+0.5%	-31.9%
Jan 16 Revenue	\$1.06M	\$1.63M	\$0.74M	\$1.35M
Jan 16 Revenue +/- last year	-21.3%	-13.9%	-5.0%	-23.4%
Feb 16 Riders	15,820	16,086	6,285	18,163
Feb 16 Rider % +/- last year	-11.8%	+6.2%	-7.7%	-21.8%
Feb 16 Revenue	\$1.16M	\$1.66M	\$0.65M	\$1.30M
Feb 16 Revenue +/- last year	-12.5%	-3.2%	-9.8%	-13.9%

In January, regional ridership was basically down/flat while revenue was down sharply across the board. Flooding in January continued to affect the *CITY* and *Eagle*. In February, flooding and the bridge closure over the Bonnet Carre Spillway affected the *CITY*, and the *Eagle* had some weather-related disruptions.

On-Time Performance

The On-Time performance for the entire Amtrak system was 82.8% for January and 80.6% for February.

Route Name	Jan 16 OT%	Feb 16 OT%
<i>CITY of New Orleans</i>	83.9%	84.5%
<i>Crescent</i>	70.2%	34.5%
<i>Sunset Limited</i>	75.0%	70.8%
<i>Texas Eagle</i>	61.3%	50.0%

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

Baton Rouge/Florida

Although no official proposal has yet to be brought forward by Governor Edwards for the Baton Rouge to New Orleans, he continues to support the train and does most of the legislature. There have also been several positive editorials in area newspapers in favor of the project. Reports are that the management of the (proposed) operating railroads have become negative about operating the train, but if real money is brought forward to improve the line likely the railroads will be cooperative.

The Gulf Coast Working Group continues to meet to discuss ways of building support for the New Orleans to Florida train. This group is also tasked with determining the cost of the reinstatement of service, and to this end Amtrak recently inspected most of the train stations to determine the capital needs required (Mobile currently has no train station as CSX has recently torn down the old depot).

Odds and Ends

- LARP now has an active Facebook page with more than 1,200 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 started offering business class service on the *Crescent* starting April 1st. The seating is 2 seats on one side of the aisle and 1 seat on the other, and includes complimentary drinks. The fare is basically double the regular coach fare, but may well be worth the extra cost – especially for single passengers.
- The city of Birmingham, AL is building a new \$30 million Intermodal Terminal that will include Amtrak, and is expected to open by the end of 2016. The old L&N terminal, the current Amtrak depot, will be torn down after the new building opens (no loss!). Birmingham is served by Amtrak’s *Crescent*.
- The Brightline service in Florida continues to make progress on the construction of stations in Miami, Fort Lauderdale, and West Palm Beach, and Siemens is currently building their trains. In Texas, opposition is building to the high-speed rail that Texas Central is proposing with residents, but no official opposition has come from the state government. The city of Houston is attempting to get a downtown train station built for the new service.



Texas & Pacific’s *Louisiana Daylight*, pulled by 4-6-2 #712, coming into New Orleans, 1951. This was a day train between Ft. Worth and New Orleans. The train was just minutes away from T&P’s terminal on Race Street.

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, May 14**, at New Orleans Union Passenger Terminal, 1001 Loyola Avenue.



LARP Membership Application

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

Name _____

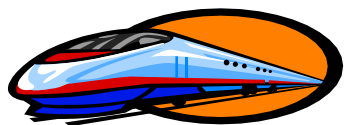
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☐ I can work actively for LARP. Please contact me.

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