

# *Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers*

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## September-October Newsletter

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### **Amtrak**

#### **National Happenings**

As expected, the Congress did not pass budgets for the FY17 fiscal year before the October 1 deadline, but they did pass a Continuing Resolution that was passed in late September that kept the government open. Amtrak received \$1.39 billion for FY17, about the same as it received in FY16. Amtrak's appropriation for FY17 is about \$50 million less than what was authorized in the Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act.

The November 8<sup>th</sup> election could have enormous impact on Amtrak's funding. A lot of focus has been on the presidential election - and that is certainly important - but most of what affects Amtrak comes from the Congress. The recent funding amounts passed by Congress for Amtrak have been modest, basically just keeping the current system running with no money for new equipment. Imagine the impact if Amtrak received the \$5 billion that the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) currently receives each year in general fund taxpayer money. A Congress that was more open to infrastructure spending might be willing to radically increase Amtrak spending.

Amtrak has received a \$2.45 billion loan from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) to build new train sets for the Northeast Corridor. The payments on the loan go out over many years and would be paid out of the increase profits from these new trains. Supposedly the FRA is authorized to loan out much more – up to \$30 billion – so it's possible that a similar loan could be arranged to build new equipment for the long-distance trains.

Amtrak's new CEO Wick Moorman started his new job September 1. Moorman is a very experienced railroader as former CEO of Norfolk Southern, and he has a love of passenger trains. Moorman has been out riding the train as he has recently been spotted on the *Crescent*. LARP is hopeful that Moorman will improve Amtrak service and make expansion possible.

#### **Gulf Coast/Baton Rouge**

The Gulf Coast Working Group report on how to bring back the New Orleans to Florida train was due to Congress in late September. Supposedly the alternative that was chosen was an extension of the *City of New Orleans* from Chicago through New Orleans to Orlando, along with a stand alone New Orleans to Mobile train. The next steps are to work with Congress to fund the upgrades.

Concerning the Baton Rouge train, in early September Louisiana received a \$30 million FASTLANE federal grant to pay for the environmental impact study for the new service along with (much needed) rail crossing upgrades.

## Polar Express

Amtrak and Rail Events Productions are teaming up to run Polar Express trains out of New Orleans Union Passenger Terminal from December 10 through December 31, and as of early October the trains were completely sold out. Basically they will be using five Horizon coaches per train with a passenger capacity of 350 or so and running 5 times a day and charging about \$50 per head – so likely this will be a very profitable operation. The trains will not leave Amtrak property and may go only four or five miles, but the ride will be about the experience. The Polar Express is a very smart marketing tool for Amtrak and will introduce many first time train riders to the charm of riding a train.

## Birmingham Intermodal Facility

Amtrak's *Crescent* station stop will move to Birmingham's new \$32 million facility in March, 2017. The new facility will have Amtrak, Greyhound, Megabus, city buses, taxis/Uber, bike sharing, and parking for 300 automobiles. Services at the building will include a newsstand and some kind of eatery. Amtrak is currently using a small dark and cramped portion of the old L&N depot and the new facility should be a huge improvement.

## North Rampart/St. Claude Streetcar

The new Rampart/St. Claude streetcar started service October 2<sup>nd</sup>. The \$40.6 million project took 20 months to complete and will operate every 20 minutes. The route will actually go from New Orleans Union Passenger Terminal down Loyola to Canal Street and then turn on the new route from North Rampart over to St. Claude and terminating at the corner of Elysian Fields. The last streetcar to operate over this route was torn out by the New Orleans Public Service Inc. (NOPSI) in 1949.

## Amtrak National Business Performance

Time Period	Passenger Totals	% +/- Last Year	Ticket Revenue	% +/- Last Year	Cost Recov. %	Recov. % Last Year	Employee Total
July 16	2.92M	+2.1%	\$202.3M	+0.2%	106%	106%	20,302
Aug 16	2.76M	+2.3%	\$185.7M	+3.1%	97%	100%	20,215

The chart above highlights totals for all of Amtrak's business units. M stands for million. For July, long-distance ridership was up 5% with revenues up 3% - August ridership was up 4% with revenues up 2%.

## 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>
July 16 Riders	24,963	27,434	11,367	34,585
July 16 Rider % +/- last year	+0.9%	-7.7%	+11.0%	+18.1%
July 16 Revenue	\$2.10M	\$3.33M	\$1.30M	\$2.66M
July 16 Revenue +/- last year	+4.2%	+2.8%	-3.6%	+3.9%
Aug 16 Riders	20,813	22,649	8,461	29,890
Aug 16 Rider % +/- last year	-0.4%	-12.1%	+8.3%	+15.4%
Aug 16 Revenue	\$1.56M	\$2.60M	\$0.90M	\$2.08M
Aug 16 Revenue +/- last year	+1.5%	-6.3%	+4.6%	+3.5%

July was a good month compared to last year, except for the *Crescent*. Not sure if the business class on the *Crescent* is affecting the overall ridership or not as the train only has three regular coaches now instead of four, plus the more expensive business class coach. The CITY was impacted by flooding in August.

## On-Time Performance

The On-Time performance for the entire Amtrak system was 74.1% for July and 76.6% for August.

Route Name	July 16 OT%	Aug 16 OT%
<i>CITY of New Orleans</i>	79.1%	75.8%
<i>Crescent</i>	32.3%	48.4%
<i>Sunset Limited</i>	64.3%	69.2%
<i>Texas Eagle</i>	59.7%	66.1%

The on-time performance goal for Amtrak's long-distance trains is 80%. Compared with the previous July, our regional trains performed worse this July – except for the *Texas Eagle*. August year over year was pretty much the same as July.

## Odds and Ends

- LARP now has an active Facebook page with about than 1,300 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.
- The November 8<sup>th</sup> election will have 31 different public transit initiatives nationwide that will ask voters to decide to spend \$200 billion on transportation infrastructure. These ballot initiatives have passed with about a 70% success rate, so likely most of them will be approved.
- The state of North Carolina is nearing the completion of its \$520 million Piedmont Improvement project between Raleigh and Charlotte. The project closed many grade crossing, added second main tracks, and reduced the slant on many curves – all designed to reduce travel times. Two more frequencies will be added in 2017 between Raleigh and Charlotte, bringing the total round trips to five per day.
- Brightline officials say the first leg from Miami to West Palm Beach is 65% complete with the service set to begin late 2017. There is a lawsuit that is attacking their sale of bonds that could affect the route to Orlando, but the bond market is so soft that the bonds may not sell anyway. Brightline has said they would have other finance options if the bond sale fell through.
- Amtrak seriously needs to look at reducing some of the schedule pad for both the *Sunset Limited* and *City of New Orleans*. In September there were two instance of where both *Sunset Limited* trains 1 and 2 departed their originating terminals over 3 hours late only to arrive at the other end early. And the *City of New Orleans* frequently waits for time at intermediate stations and is often 50 minutes early arriving New Orleans.

## 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, December 10**, at NOUPT, 1001 Loyola Avenue. LARP **will not** have a November meeting.



### LARP Membership Application

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

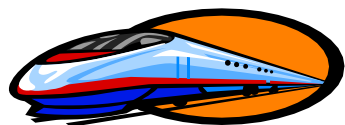
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☐ I can work actively for LARP. Please contact me.

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