

Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers

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January-February Newsletter

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Amtrak

National Happenings

The new Trump administration interface with transportation is Elaine Chao. Chao served in the Bush administration in the Labor Department and as Deputy Secretary in transportation. Chao is very conservative and it's unknown at this point if she will fight for Amtrak funding in the administration's budget proposals. Right now the federal government including Amtrak is funded by a Continuing Resolution (CR) that expires in late April, so either Congress will have to pass real budgets or pass another stop-gap measure to finish out the fiscal year through September. It's likely that the Trump administration will have (at least) some input on what Congress does with the budget going forward past the expiration of the CR, so rail advocates should know quickly how Amtrak will be funded in the coming budget. There has been talk from the new administration about shutting down various programs, but so far Amtrak hasn't been included in the list. Amtrak does enjoy strong bipartisan support in Congress, so even with the GOP controlling both the House and Senate it's not likely that a shutdown budget for Amtrak would be approved. However, rail advocates will need to monitor carefully budget proposals that come forth from the Trump administration and Congress and be ready to contact their Congressional Representative should the need arise.

Democrats unveiled a \$1 trillion infrastructure program that aligned with what President Trump was proposing during the campaign, but it was rejected by the GOP in Congress. About one half of the funding would have been for transportation, including hundreds of billions for rail. The actual amount of infrastructure spending will be probably be much lower (if it happens at all) with the Trump administration pushing a public/private partnership to fund the improvements.

If infrastructure funding were made available by Congress for passenger rail, the cost to build new passenger cars and locomotives and to upgrade the existing track would be steep. New single-level cars (Viewliners) would cost about \$4 million each, new double-deck Superliners would cost about \$6 million each, and locomotives would likely cost upwards of \$8 million each. New 110-mph FRA class 6 track would likely cost about \$10 million per mile, and that doesn't include a bridge crossing a major body of water. For instance, a new rail bridge crossing the Mississippi River at Baton Rouge would cost \$1 billion on its own. Class 6 track would basically be all concrete and steel with advanced signaling and grade crossing separation. A New Orleans to Baton Rouge class 6 single track would cost about \$800 million, and to build all the way to Houston could cost \$5 billion. True 220-mph high speed rail is extraordinarily expensive with costs per mile starting at about \$50 million per mile for the Texas Central project and topping out at \$275 million per mile for the new Northeast Corridor.

Gulf Coast/Baton Rouge

So far there has not been an official capital cost figure released to reinstate service from New Orleans to Florida, although some news reports have the figure as high as \$2 billion. The plan is to operate an overnight extension of the *City of New Orleans* east from New Orleans to Orlando, and also one or two New Orleans to Mobile trains with a possible Thruway bus extension from Mobile to Jacksonville.

Baton Rouge service is on hold likely due to the state's budget problems, but there is talk of increasing the gas tax to pay for infrastructure improvements (mostly highways), so a plan to pay the \$260+ million in capital costs for the train could certainly be included in any proposal.

Amtrak National Business Performance

Time Period	Passenger Totals	% +/- Last Year	Ticket Revenue	% +/- Last Year	Cost Recov. %	Recov. % Last Year	Employee Total
Oct 16	2.62M	-0.8%	\$186.4M	-1.6%	100%	100%	20,245
Nov 16	2.71M	+2.4%	\$199.2M	+1.6%	98%	103%	20,167
Dec 16	2.67M	+3.5%	\$192.2M	+2.6%	103%	104%	20,041

The chart above highlights totals for all of Amtrak's business units. M stands for million. For October, long-distance ridership was up 3.2% with revenues up 1.7%, November ridership was up 2.3% with revenues up 0.8%, and December ridership was up 0.9% with revenues up 2.6%.

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>
Oct 16 Riders	21,405	22,008	7,549	26,351
Oct 16 Rider % +/- last year	-3.5%	-2.6%	-1.4%	+24.4%
Oct 16 Revenue	\$1.54M	\$2.61M	\$0.86M	\$1.77M
Oct 16 Revenue +/- last year	-1.0%	+9.0%	+1.9%	+8.4%
Nov 16 Riders	20,271	23,967	8,561	28,809
Nov 16 Rider % +/- last year	-1.4%	-3.6%	-1.1%	+12.9%
Nov 16 Revenue	\$1.53M	\$2.61M	\$0.93M	\$1.99M
Nov 16 Revenue +/- last year	-4.2%	-1.8%	-3.5%	+7.8%
Dec 16 Riders	21,824	26,518	9,184	32,233
Dec 16 Rider % +/- last year	+1.9%	-0.7%	+1.3%	+19.0%
Dec 16 Revenue	\$1.65M	\$2.88M	\$1.00M	\$2.34M
Dec 16 Revenue +/- last year	+0.5%	+0.8%	-3.9%	+9.5%

The ridership for all three months was basically flat with a downward trend compared to last year – the Texas Eagle spike in ridership/revenue probably was due to an annulment last year.

On-Time Performance

The On-Time performance for the entire Amtrak system was 79.8% for Oct, 76.2% for November, and 78.0% for December.

Route Name	Oct 16 OT%	Nov 16 OT%	Dec 16 OT%
<i>CITY of New Orleans</i>	80.6%	66.7%	59.7%
<i>Crescent</i>	75.8%	61.7%	62.9%
<i>Sunset Limited</i>	76.9%	73.1%	80.8%
<i>Texas Eagle</i>	69.4%	68.3%	72.6%

The on-time performance goal for Amtrak's long-distance trains is 80%. Compared with the previous October, the *Crescent* and *Texas Eagle* were much improved. For November, the *Crescent* and *Texas Eagle* were again much improved, but the *City of New Orleans* was worse. For December, the *Crescent* and *Texas Eagle* were somewhat improved, but the *City of New Orleans* was far worse.

Odds and Ends

- LARP now has an active Facebook page with about 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 new single-level Viewliner cars should be delivered over the rest of this year. There is already one new diner in service and the next one should start service in March with the remainder of the 25 cars to be delivered over the Spring. The diners will reequip the *Crescent*, *Silver Meteor*, and *Lake Shore Limited*. The total car order is 70 baggage cars (delivered), 25 diners, 10 baggage/crew dorms, and 25 sleepers.
- Virginia will extend their New York to Lynchburg train into Roanoke later this year, and also plans to soon add another frequency south from Washington to Lynchburg and possibly into Roanoke as well. Bristol is only about 150 miles to the southwest from Roanoke and hopefully that will be the next extension. Virginia has spent hundreds of billions in state taxpayer dollars on passenger rail improvements, particularly in the Washington to Richmond corridor.
- Brightline has been testing their new brightly-colored train and expects to receive another train set this Spring. The service initially will start later this year from West Palm Beach to Miami with the Orlando portion expected to come on line at a later date – perhaps 2018, depending on financing and construction. The new Orlando depot is under construction about a mile from the Orlando International Airport to be connected by a people mover.
- The Texas DOT plans to spend \$12.6 billion on highways in 2017, more than Louisiana's entire backlog of unfunded highway projects, and the state of Florida plans to spend \$2 billion just to add a lane onto I-4 from coast to coast. But neither state plans to spend any taxpayer money on intercity passenger rail improvements.

2017 LARP Officers

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

Dues were payable January 1, 2017.

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 11, 2017**, at NOUPT, 1001 Loyola Avenue.



LARP Membership Application

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

Name _____

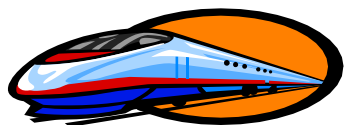
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