



# *Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers*

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## July-August 2017 Newsletter

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### **Amtrak**

#### **National Happenings**

FY18 budgets still have not been approved by either the House or the Senate. However, the House T&I committee did approve \$1.4 billion for Amtrak (the same as last year), and the Senate Appropriations Committee approved \$1.6 billion (\$200 million more than last year). It's a good sign that Congress is rejecting the White House attempts to defund Amtrak's long-distance trains. It's not likely at this point that Congress will pass actual budgets, so what will probably happen is the passage of a short term Continuing Resolution that funds the government at last year's levels.

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

The Southern Rail Commission finally released its Working Group report for the return of Gulf Coast rail service, and it calls for the allocation of \$117.7 million to reinstate service. The report recommends daily long-distance train service between Orlando and New Orleans (operating cost of \$5.48 million annually) and a daily regional train between New Orleans and Mobile (cost of \$4 million annually). However, CSX is balking and wants \$2.3 billion. CSX had been negotiating in good faith and the two sides appeared close to deal *until* Hunter Harrison took over as CEO, and then CSX refused to negotiate any further. In fact, a CSX official in Jacksonville (one of the few that didn't get fired!) wrote in a letter to the editor at the Times Picayune in advance of the issuance of the report to say that the passenger train service, "wasn't workable." CSX's demands for \$2.3 billion are nonsense, of course, as it only spends \$1.5 billion yearly to maintain its entire 21,000 mile system. One of two things will happen that will bring CSX back to negotiate in good faith – political pressure from regional politicians, or a complete bankruptcy of the railroad due to Harrison's rapid changes (a distinct possibility) and subsequent takeover by another railroad.

For Baton Rouge, a consultant is to be hired to plan/design passenger rail stations. Designers have a year to plan and design the stations. The project had received \$500,000 for conceptual design and that's what is funding the consultants. There still isn't a firm plan in place to fund the estimated \$262 million in upfront capital costs or to pay the operating subsidies once the trains are running.

No news on service through north Louisiana or between Shreveport and Dallas.

## Hurricane Harvey

At the end of August the *Sunset Limited* was only operating San Antonio - Los Angeles (the *Texas Eagle* is operating normally as well). The last eastbound #2 came through Houston Friday, August 25 and the storm made landfall early that next morning. Amtrak has even evacuated the *Sunset Limited* trainset out of New Orleans and was ready to suspend all operations at New Orleans and evacuate all of its equipment if the storm had made a larger impact here. There is no estimate of when service will be restored, but it will likely be another week or so.

## Amtrak National Business Performance

Time Period	Passenger Totals	% +/- Last Year	Ticket Revenue	% +/- Last Year	Cost Recov. %	Recov. % Last Year	Employee Total
May 17	2.77M	+1.7%	\$198.0M	+2.6%	114%	116%	20,003
Jun 17	2.82M	+2.4%	\$204.9M	+3.6%	107%	109%	19,894

The chart above highlights totals for all of Amtrak's business units. M stands for million. For May, the long-distance ridership was down 2.5% compared to last May, and although June ridership was down 0.3% revenues increased by 3.1%.

## 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>
May 17 Riders	22,961	23,387	8,871	27,341
May 17 Rider % +/- last year	+1.9%	+4.4%	+5.0%	+4.9%
May 17 Revenue	\$1.72M	\$2.63M	\$0.97M	\$1.91M
May 17 Revenue +/- last year	+1.9%	+0.6%	+5.8%	+4.8%
Jun 17 Riders	23,195	24,734	10,494	30,282
Jun 17 Rider % +/- last year	+0.8%	+1.9%	+12.6%	-0.1%
Jun 17 Revenue	\$1.79M	\$2.92M	\$1.19M	\$2.19M
Jun 17 Revenue +/- last year	+1.8%	+7.1%	+12.7%	-4.5%

All of the Louisiana regional trains were all pretty flat compared to last May.

## On-Time Performance

The On-Time performance for the entire Amtrak system was 70.3% for May and 66.8% for June.

Route Name	May 17 OT%	Jun 17 OT%
<i>City of New Orleans</i>	62.9%	56.7%
<i>Crescent</i>	6.5%	21.7%
<i>Sunset Limited</i>	69.2%	46.2%
<i>Texas Eagle</i>	24.2%	41.7%

The on-time performance goal for Amtrak's long-distance trains is 80%. Compared with the previous May, the *Crescent* was much worse (nearly 60 points), along with the *City of New Orleans* and *Texas Eagle* (about 20 points worse), with the *Sunset Limited* being about the same. For June, all of the trains were much worse than last year except for the *Texas Eagle*'s marginal improvement (up for 21.7% last June).



Southern Railway's *Southerner* southbound at Laurel, MS in February, 1942. A C.W. Witbeck photo.

## Odds and Ends

- LARP now has an active Facebook page with more than 1,350 followers – “Like” us on Facebook to get rapid notification of news. Our website *LARPail.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 \$1.6 billion Farley post office project is coming along nicely with work well underway to transform the old post office into a new train hall. When it is complete there will be a large space for train passengers to wait between changing trains and retail space. The new space will be a huge improvement over the underground remains of Penn Station.
- Amtrak will complete its Penn Station track work on September 5<sup>th</sup>, allowing all scheduled train service to resume service to New York (including the *Crescent* which had been terminating/originating at Washington, DC). The work was completed on time and on budget.
- Firms have been chosen to help design and study the Texas Central route between Dallas and Houston – Flour Enterprises and Lane Construction. Once the financing is in place for the \$12 billion project and all the approvals have been secured, these companies would then be the primary builders of the new line. The new trains will make the 240 mile trip in 90 minutes and hit speeds of 200 mph.
- Amtrak has a new CEO (or co-CEO with Moorman) – Richard Anderson, the former Delta Airlines CEO.
- Brightline is expected to start commuter service operations between West Palm Beach and Miami later this year, likely in December. Once the initial service starts the company plans to focus on the phase 2 Orlando.

## 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 a.m. Saturday, September 9, 2017** at **New Orleans Union Passenger Terminal** in room 201. Ask the security guard to open the door to let you upstairs.



### 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.

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