



# *Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers*

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## November-December 2017 Newsletter

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### **Amtrak**

#### **National Happenings**

Amtrak still doesn't have a budget for FY18 as the government is funded only through January 19 by a Continuing Resolution, but Amtrak does still enjoy strong bipartisan support in Congress. Even though the Trump administration has proposed closing all of Amtrak's long-distance routes, there is no support for such a draconian proposal from the majority in Congress. Also, the Republicans will have to work with the Democrats on the budget to close out the fiscal year through September and they'll need 60 votes in the Senate to invoke cloture on the budget. Amtrak will likely receive for FY18 very close to what they actually received for FY17.

The Trump administration nominated former Rep. Lynn Westmoreland (R-GA) to serve on Amtrak's Board for a five-year term. As a member of Congress Westmoreland frequently voted to cut or zero out Amtrak funding. However, during his confirmation hearing he acknowledged the importance of federal funding for passenger rail.

#### **Gulf Coast Restoration**

Aside from a December meeting of the Southern Rail Commission to discuss implementation issues, there has been no movement to restore Amtrak service. CSX is still demanding \$2+ billion to reinstate service, and although their CEO Hunter Harrison recently passed away, the person hired by the Board (Jim Foote) was a close associate of Harrison and believed to want to continue Harrison's changes at the railroad.

#### **Amtrak National Business Performance**

Time Period	Passenger Totals	% +/- Last Year	Ticket Revenue	% +/- Last Year	Cost Recovery %
Sept 17	2.54M	-1.5%	\$180.5M	-1.8%	95%
Oct 17	2.78M	+3.1	\$204.7M	+5.0	102%

The chart above highlights totals for all of Amtrak's business units. M stands for million. For September, the long-distance ridership was down 7.4% and revenue was down 3.0%, likely due the hurricane cancellations. For the fiscal year ending September, Amtrak carried 31.7 million passengers and lowered its operating loss to \$194 million (through a reduction of expenses). Amtrak wants to eliminate the operating loss entirely, and breaking even is a goal of new CEO Richard Anderson.

## 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>
Sept 17 Riders	19,213	20,108	5,583	25,640
Sept 17 Rider % +/- last year	-6.3%	-1.4%	-16.7%	+4.9%
Sept 17 Revenue	\$1.4M	\$2.2M	\$0.6M	\$1.7M
Sept 17 Revenue +/- last year	-7.5%	-0.9%	-23.9%	+6.2%
Oct 17 Riders	20K	22K	7K	29K
Oct 17 Revenue	\$1.5M	\$2.6M	\$0.8M	\$1.9M

Amtrak has changed their monthly reports, eliminating much of the analysis they had previously supplied, reflected in October's numbers. K stands for thousands.

## On-Time Performance

The On-Time performance for the entire Amtrak system was 74.6% for September and 75.0% for October.

Route Name	Sept 17 OT%	Oct 17 OT%
<i>City of New Orleans</i>	68.3%	64.5%
<i>Crescent</i>	42.2%	12.9%
<i>Sunset Limited</i>	68.3%	51.9%
<i>Texas Eagle</i>	60.7%	43.5%

The on-time performance goal for Amtrak's long-distance trains is 80%. For September the *Crescent* continued to perform poorly with most trains operating late. For October the *Crescent* again operated poorly and the ridership declines reflect the poor ontime performance. Norfolk Southern is replacing millions of defective wooden crossties that degraded much faster than normal and it's believed this unexpected work is causing delays to Amtrak trains.

## Annual Crescent Closure

For five weeks between January 8 and February 8, the *Crescent* route will be closed from New Orleans to Atlanta Mondays through Thursdays due to Norfolk Southern track work (maintenance blitz). The route will be closed from New Orleans to Atlanta for both trains 19 and 20 from January 8-January 11, January 15-January 18, January 22-January 25, January 29-February 1, and February 5-February 8. The route will operate normally during the closure Fridays-Sundays during the track work period from New Orleans to New York. Amtrak will provide a bus during those days the route is closed serving all stations except for Picayune and Slidell.

## Polar Express

There were two Polar Express operations in New Orleans this year. Amtrak again partnered with Rail Event Productions to operate Polar Express trains out of New Orleans Union Passenger Terminal from December 8 through January 1<sup>st</sup> with all of the runs completely sold out. And new for this year, the Louisiana Steam Train Association operated their 2-8-2 steam locomotive and two Public Belt business cars from near Audubon Zoo to Canal Street carrying over 100 passengers. It was the first time in many years that a steam locomotive has operated over the Public Belt and hopefully this will become an annual tradition.

## Odds and Ends

- LARP now has an active Facebook page with more than 1,370 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.
- According to AAA, the average cost of owning a new vehicle is \$706 per month, including component costs, depreciation, repair, fuel, and maintenance. That is lot of money to spend per vehicle for something that sits unused for the majority of time. Rail transit could be a much less expensive and viable alternative.
- It looks like Illinois is getting new passenger rail cars after all to go along with its new Charger locomotives. Sunitomo and Siemens are building 88 single-level cars for the Illinois Department of Transportation, and likely will be similar to what Brightline will be operating in Florida. The new cars will be used in corridor operations out of Chicago and should vastly improve customer satisfaction.
- Brightline plans to start service between West Palm Beach and Fort Lauderdale on January 8 with service to Miami to start up shortly thereafter. Brightline has also started construction north of West Palm Beach and has applied for a federal loan to help pay for the full cost.
- The new Birmingham, AL, train station is expected to open mid-January. Birmingham is served by Amtrak’s *Crescent* from New Orleans to New York.



Amtrak #19, the southbound Crescent, at Brompton, AL, 12/8/17. Photographer unknown.

## 2017 LARP Officers

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

**Dues are payable January 1, 2018.**

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 LARP meeting will be 10:00 a.m. Saturday January 13, 2018** at New Orleans Union Passenger Terminal in the second floor conference room.



### 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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