



# Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers

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## September-October 2017 Newsletter

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### Amtrak

#### National Happenings

In a House vote on the budget in early September, Rep. Mel Brooks (R-AL) introduced an amendment to eliminate \$1.1 billion in Amtrak subsidies, but the amendment was defeated 128-293. The vote shows the strong support that Amtrak has in Congress. However, not all news is good as President Trump named Leon Westmoreland to Amtrak's Board. Westmoreland, a former member of Congress who twice voted to defund Amtrak, now has a five-year term on the Board of Directors.

Amtrak is implementing a "Voluntary Separation Incentive Program," otherwise known as a management buyout, to thin the ranks of management. Management will receive up to 26 weeks of pay and insurance coverage during the period. The company plans to offer the incentive until December 31<sup>st</sup> and then determine if involuntary separations will be required.

#### Gulf Coast/Baton Rouge/I-20

The Southern Rail Commission, tourism officials in Mississippi, and Amtrak remain optimistic about the return of Gulf Coast rail service. CSX has yet to budge on its demand for \$2.3 billion, but the belief among officials is that it's a matter of when train service will return, not if it will return. The goal is to get the train service running first and then negotiate and perform the improvements in phases.

The only word on Baton Rouge is that the firm HNTB has been selected to plan the two train stations in East Baton Rouge Parish.

The I-20 Corridor Council is making a fresh push for the Atlanta to Ft. Worth train. They obtained federal funds several years ago and are working on a capacity study with the freight railroads to determine the capital cost to implement Amtrak service. The train would basically be an offshoot of the *Crescent* route at Meridian, and Amtrak has already stated that a Ft. Worth to Meridian train would not require an operating subsidy.

#### Hurricanes

The *Sunset Limited* was annulled to/from New Orleans for three weeks from August 25 to September 15 due to the track damage from Hurricane Harvey in Texas. Amtrak's *Crescent* was also annulled for one day September 11 in both directions due to the impact of Hurricane Irma. And for Hurricane Nate in early October, Amtrak suspended

service into/out of New Orleans for two days turning the *Crescent* short at Birmingham, the *City of New Orleans* at Jackson, and the *Sunset Limited* at San Antonio.

## Amtrak National Business Performance

Time Period	Passenger Totals	% +/- Last Year	Ticket Revenue	% +/- Last Year	Cost Recov. %	Recov. % Last Year	Employee Total
July 17	2.88M	-1.6%	\$199.9M	-1.2%	96%	99%	19,877
Aug 17	2.81M	+2.3%	\$191.8M	+3.3%	97%	95%	19,821

The chart above highlights totals for all of Amtrak's business units. M stands for million. For July, the long-distance ridership was down 0.2% with flat revenues compared to last July, and August ridership was up 4.4% with revenues increased by 4.3%.

## 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 17 Riders	24,905	24,188	9,969	35,798
July 17 Rider % +/- last year	-0.2%	-11.9%	-12.3%	+3.5%
July 17 Revenue	\$1.99M	\$2.54M	\$1.18M	\$2.60M
July 17 Revenue +/- last year	-5.2%	-23.9%	-9.2%	-2.6%
Aug 17 Riders	21,590	19,362	7,319	30,744
Aug 17 Rider % +/- last year	+3.7%	-14.5%	-13.5%	+4.6%
Aug 17 Revenue	\$1.62M	\$1.84M	\$0.80M	\$2.10M
Aug 17 Revenue +/- last year	+3.3%	-29.4%	-11.5%	-1.0%

The *Crescent* was really hammered over the summer due to being operated from Washington to New Orleans only skipping New York (due to Penn Station track work), along with Norfolk Southern dispatching issues for the southbound train 19 that regularly operated hours late into New Orleans.

## On-Time Performance

The On-Time performance for the entire Amtrak system was 67.9% for July and 74.2 % for August.

Route Name	July 17 OT%	Aug 17 OT%
<i>City of New Orleans</i>	74.2%	74.2%
<i>Crescent</i>	24.2%	29.0%
<i>Sunset Limited</i>	57.7%	65.4%
<i>Texas Eagle</i>	43.5%	59.7%

The on-time performance goal for Amtrak's long-distance trains is 80%. Compared with the previous July, all of on-time performance for the regional trains was worse than last July, ranging from 5 to 16 points worse. For August, the *Crescent* was much worse (about 20 points less), with the other trains about the same as last year.

## Odds and Ends

- LARP now has an active Facebook page with more than 1,360 followers – “Like” us on Facebook to get rapid notification of news. Our website *LARPrair.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.
- Brightline has officially started construction north of West Palm Beach on the Orlando portion of the route. The company has sought construction permits and plans to start the actual work on installing new tracks in the near future. Service to the Orlando airport could commence by 2019, and service from Miami to West Palm Beach is expected to commence later this year.
- Amtrak will again partner with Polar Express to run trains in/out of New Orleans Union Passenger Terminal in late November and all of December. The trains run only on Amtrak property a short distance to about the City Park Avenue overpass and then back into the station. The trains as of the editing of this newsletter were already sold out prior to Christmas and there were only a few tickets left afterwards.
- Amtrak implemented new service to Roanoke, VA, operating an inaugural run on October 31<sup>st</sup>. The Roanoke train is an extension of the Lynchburg train to New York. Virginia has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in a bipartisan manner into track and station improvements and they are already talking about a second frequency.



Illinois Central's southbound *City of New Orleans* departing Chicago in March of 1964. Photo by Roger Puta.

## 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. **There will be no regular LARP meeting in November.**



### **LARP Membership Application**

Single member \$20     Family Member \$30

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