

# *Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers*

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[www.LARPrail.com](http://www.LARPrail.com)

## January-February 2019 Newsletter

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### Amtrak

#### National Happenings

After a lengthy government shutdown, a Continuing Resolution was finally approved all the way through September, 2019. Strangely enough, it was a transportation issue that brought the government shutdown to a quick end as unpaid air traffic controllers were calling in sick and delaying flights. Amtrak again received \$1.95 billion, about the same as the previous year, with \$650 million for the Northeast Corridor and the rest basically for the national network. Amtrak released their FY18 annual report with limited information but a few conclusions can be reached about operations. Total long-distance revenue for FY18 was \$523.4 million, down just over 2% from the previous year of \$534.8 million. Ridership for FY18 for long distance was 4.51 million, down 3.9% from the previous year of 4.69 million. With such a strong economy and travel market it's hard to imagine why Amtrak's ridership should be down so sharply (Amtrak cites route truncations and low gas prices as reasons), but Amtrak also eliminated several discounts and removed food service from some overnight trains. Removing hot meal service from overnight trains is not conducive to building ridership and revenue.

Next up on the agenda will be to reauthorize Amtrak, due to expire in 2020, and hopefully the new House leadership will make positive changes to how Amtrak operates, in particular with getting rid of the requirement that food service break even, and also protecting routes from being broken up. One of the reasons why Amtrak has been making such big cuts to food service is because the FAST Act Authorization that gives Amtrak its legal status states that no federal funds can be used to subsidize food service by 2020. This one provision needs to be taken out when Amtrak is reauthorized, and since this previous language came from a few House members that are no longer in Congress, it's hoped that this bad language can be removed in the new transportation bill to come. Also, with persistent rumors that Amtrak intends to discontinue some long-distance routes and instead focus resources into day trains between populated cities, the national network needs some kind of protection to force Amtrak's Board to continue operating these existing trains just as they are.

Amtrak has finally started to take delivery of the first of 25 new Viewliner sleepers, 10 new Viewliner sleeper/dorms, and the remaining Viewliner dining cars. The production of the cars have had many delays and are at least two-three years behind schedule. Supposedly Amtrak has installed new large convection ovens in the dining cars that can heat up 24 meals at a time, and the new sleeping cars/sleeper dorms can be used to help increase the capacity of the eastern long-distance trains. So the trains will have new baggage cars, dining cars, and dorm cars, and full sleeping cars – all that will be left to replace will be the 40-year old coaches and the lounge cars. In the meantime there has been no movement at all to order new Superliner cars to replace the original 40-year old cars.

## Regional Happenings

Most of our regional trains were down in ridership and revenue compared to last year.

Time Period	<i>City of New Orleans</i>	<i>Crescent</i>	<i>Sunset Limited</i>	<i>Texas Eagle</i>
FY18 Riders	237,800	274,800	99,000	335,800
FY17 Rider % +/- last year	-6.7%	+6.1%	-1.9%	-2.9%
FY18 Revenue	\$19.4M	\$33.1M	\$12.4M	\$25.7M
FY17 Revenue +/- last year	-4.9%	+6.4%	0.0%	-4.8%

## On Time Performance

Amtrak has ranked the freight railroads in how they perform with operating Amtrak trains - #1 Canadian Pacific, #2 BNSF, #3 Union Pacific, #4 CSX, #5 Canadian National, and #6 Norfolk Southern. Amtrak has a goal of limiting host railroad delays to 900 minutes per 10,000 train miles, and Norfolk Southern consistently has exceeded Amtrak's goal limit by 33%. In fact, Norfolk Southern received the letter grade F for its operation of Amtrak trains. The *Crescent* is a particular problem train with NS, especially west of Atlanta as the train normally loses 2 to 3 hours per day, and the on time performance for the train worsened even more during most of 2018. For the *Crescent* passenger in 2018, they endured more delays on average than any other train – averaging 136 minutes of delays over 12 months. For December, 2018, the on time performance was 74.7% for the entire system and 45.4% for the long-distance trains.

Route Name	Dec18 OT%	12Month OT%
<i>CITY of New Orleans</i>	54.8%	50.8%
<i>Crescent</i>	19.6%	29.4%
<i>Sunset Limited</i>	16.3%	25.9%
<i>Texas Eagle</i>	40.8%	37.0%

## Gulf Coast Restoration

There has been no discernable movement with gulf coast restoration to either Mobile or Orlando. The latest efforts have been focused on starting up two frequencies per day between New Orleans and Mobile, but Mississippi and Alabama have both so far refused to provide state matching funds (with federal funds) to make the trains a reality. In related news, the line sale from Pensacola east to Baldwin has been canceled, so CSX will retain the line for now. Selling the line to a shortline railroad had complicated efforts to restore service to Orlando.

## Baton Rouge

There has been no discernable movement with the Baton Rouge train. The state of Louisiana has not asked for a federal match and has not identified state funds that could be used to match those federal funds. In addition, the Kansas City Southern's position has hardened against operating passenger service and likely would require more than the \$260 million estimated to operate the service. When funding is lined up political support is lost, and then when political support is lined up funding dries up. One day everything will line up and the trains will run (LARP has been advocating for New Orleans to Baton Rouge since 1980), but it's going to require strong public support before it happens.



Illinois Central's *Panama Limited* at New Orleans on May 30, 1966. Photo by Bill Howes.

## Odds and Ends

- LARP now has an active Facebook page with more than 1,400 followers – “Like” us on Facebook to get rapid notification of news. Our website [LARPrair.com](http://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 is supposed to start construction work in March to double track the railroad north from West Palm Beach to Cocoa, but financing remains an issue. The company, to be rebranded Virgin trains, was to do an IPO to sell stock, but they canceled it. It looks like Brightline/Virgin will issue more bonds to raise the required capital to build out to Orlando.
- Both the *Crescent* and *Sunset Limited* endured service disruptions in January and February due to track work. The *Crescent* was canceled Monday-Thursday for six weeks between New Orleans and Atlanta, and one frequency of the *Sunset Limited* was canceled with the train only operating two days per week.

## 2019 LARP Officers

**John Sita** President; **Andrew Lodriguss** Vice-President, **Louis Bangma** Secretary/Treasurer

**Dues were payable January 1, 2019.**

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 event will be a Rail & Transit Summit at 10:00 a.m. Saturday March 16, 2019** at New Orleans Union Passenger Terminal in the second floor conference room.



### LARP Membership Application

Single member \$20     Family Member \$30

Name \_\_\_\_\_

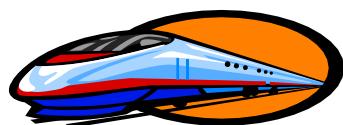
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I can work actively for LARP. Please contact me.

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