

# Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers

P.O. Box 57551   New Orleans, LA 70157  
[www.LARPrail.com](http://www.LARPrail.com)

## January-February 2022 Newsletter

John Sita, Jr.—Editor  
[jsitajr@gmail.com](mailto:jsitajr@gmail.com)

### Amtrak

#### National Happenings

The federal government still has not passed budgets for the remaining fiscal year ending September 30 and has instead passed several short-term Continuing Resolutions. Basically, Amtrak is stuck at what they received last year in regular appropriations – about \$2.3 billion – not including what they will be receiving through the Investment in Infrastructure and Jobs Act (IIJA). Amtrak should be receiving about \$4.5 billion from the IIJA this year and for the next four fiscal years after that. It is possible that there will finally be budgets passed if 60 Senators agree to get past the filibuster – so Amtrak may wind up receiving somewhere near \$7 billion this year. Of the \$66 billion total passed with the IIJA, about \$22 billion will go directly to Amtrak over five years above what they receive through the regular appropriation process with \$12 billion for the national network and \$6 billion for the Northeast Corridor. The remaining \$44 billion will be awarded by the Federal Railway Administration on a competitive basis with a state match (20%) likely required.

Amtrak has temporarily cut the frequencies on most of the long-distance trains to 5-days-a-week due to covid and related employee shortages. Amtrak was on the edge of having to cancel trains due to the lack of employees, and this temporary reduction allows them to work on getting people hired while maintaining service on most days (certainly better than 3-days-a week). The *Crescent* now doesn't originate from initial terminals on Tuesday-Wednesday, and the *CITY of New Orleans* on Saturday-Sunday. Amtrak has been hiring train crews (observed on the *Crescent*) and they expect to have daily service restored in March.

Amtrak has canceled many trains due to blizzards and snow storms this year more than usual. It used to be that trains were the all-weather mode of transportation that still ran when everything else was stopped, but that is no longer the case – even for the Northeast Corridor. Amtrak managers used to take pride in keeping trains running in the Northeast but now they shut down the corridor for each named blizzard. The main issue that Amtrak is facing is a lack of employees that can keep the railroad open during these extreme snow events, but some of these problems Amtrak has brought on themselves with employee purges and buyouts in a vain attempt to reach profitability. And the freight railroads (that are only interested in cutting costs and increasing shareholder wealth) really have no interest in keeping their operations going through a blizzard, preferring to stop traffic and then waiting for the weather to improve to resume service. Many large trees have been allowed to grow very close to mainline tracks, and then these trees fill with ice and fall on the right of way. That is what happened to the *Crescent* in Virginia in January with trees down blocking the train in front and back, severely delaying the train for nearly 30 hours without working toilets in the coaches and a lack of food onboard.

## On Time Performance

For December, on-time performance was 77.6% with long-distance at 49.2%. Most railroad operators earned a grade of “A” or “B” from Amtrak concerning on time performance for the month of December except for Norfolk Southern with a “F.” For January, on time performance was 72.2% with long distance at 45.6%. Most roads again earned an “A” or “B” for January, except Union Pacific with “C” and Norfolk Southern again with an “F”.

Route Name	Dec21 OT%	Dec21 Delay/Rider	Jan22 OT%	Jan22 Delay/Rider
<i>CITY of New Orleans</i>	60.1%	94 minutes	54.3%	78 minutes
<i>Crescent</i>	46.6%	104 minutes	38.7%	165 minutes
<i>Sunset Limited</i>	32.3%	70 minutes	27.4%	132 minutes
<i>Texas Eagle</i>	73.6%	45 minutes	64.2%	59 minutes

The *CITY of New Orleans* really didn’t do well both months – usually its on time performance is much better. The *Crescent* and *Sunset Limited* were both awful, even with both trains receiving hours added to their schedules. The real bright spot was the *Texas Eagle* with respectable on time performance.

## Gulf Coast Restoration

The Surface Transportation Board (STB) held preliminary hearings in mid-February on Amtrak’s request for the STB to order CSX and Norfolk Southern to operate two daily trains. Several prominent rail advocates and Amtrak officials were allowed to testify and lay out their case before these regulators. Amtrak is basically saying that they have the right statutorily to operate service, and the new \$440 million infrastructure estimate provided by CSX is far greater than what the Gulf Coast Working Group developed (about \$100 million). CSX in the past had demanded \$2.3 billion in upgrades to run these two trains, which amounts to about twice what the railroad spends in an entire year on their systemwide infrastructure. According to Amtrak the railroad has not shared how they have arrived at their newly revised \$440 million figure. CSX has consolidated freight operations on this line and reduced the number of trains from about 10 in each direction down to 2-3 in each direction. They have greatly increased the length of the freight trains to about 200 cars, exceeding the maximum length of many of the sidings – and basically, they now expect Amtrak to pay extra to upgrade infrastructure. The STB is supposed to issue its ruling on (or shortly after) the next hearing on March 9. The Rail Passengers Association is sponsoring a petition to get signatures asking the STB to rule in favor of reinstating the trains, and LARP has sponsored a Facebook promotion to get additional signatures (we think about 300 additional signatures).

## Baton Rouge/Shreveport to Meridian Train

There is big positive news on the Baton Rouge train. The impending Canadian Pacific takeover of the Kansas City Southern is very likely going to result in the resumption in service on this line. LARP has strived for 40 years to get passenger service restored on this line. The CP is one of the better Amtrak operators, and Amtrak has endorsed the railroad’s merger plan before the Surface Transportation Board. Consequently, the CP has said that they will allow one round trip per day between New Orleans and Baton Rouge without infrastructure upgrades. Naturally such an operation would be slow and optimally it would be best to perform the infrastructure upgrade work before the trains run, but it shows the CP wants to be cooperative in expanding passenger service. The cost of upgrades necessary for a 90-minute run would be about \$300 million, and the state of Louisiana has already made an application from the FRA for funding (from the recently passed IIJA infrastructure bill). The CP will also cooperate with the Meridian to Shreveport line in expanding passenger service, agreeing to allow a study of the necessary upgrades to reinstate passenger service on that route. Both routes have not had scheduled passenger service since the late 1960s.

## 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 *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.
- LARP’s website is down – in fact, it has disappeared. If you are looking to pay your dues, please use the old-fashioned way and mail in your check. We are in the process of having a new site built, but we’re not sure when it will be completed.
- Brightline has been qualifying train crews north between West Palm Beach and Cocoa, FL, without carrying passengers. The double track project is mostly complete, and the trains will eventually operate at 110-mph on this segment. Work is also progressing on the 125-mph segment from Cocoa into Orlando International Airport. Brightline expects to finish work this year and open service to Orlando the beginning of next year. Preliminary work is also progressing on the route to Tampa with an agreement made with the state highway department for the right of way.



L&N’s “Hummingbird” likely in Alabama in the 1950s. This train ran from New Orleans to Cincinnati and was four hours faster than its “Pan American” companion train on the route. Photo by Ron Flanary.

## 2022 LARP Officers

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

**Dues were payable January 1, 2022.**

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 at NOUPT in the second floor conference room Saturday, March 12, 2022 at 10:00 a.m., and also via Zoom.** If you would like to join in on Zoom please send an email to jsitajr@gmail.com.



### LARP Membership Application

Single member \$20     Family Member \$30

Name \_\_\_\_\_

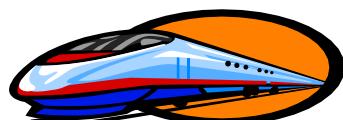
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I can work actively for LARP. Please contact me.

MAIL TO: Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers  
P.O. Box 57551  
New Orleans, LA 70157



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