

Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers

P.O. Box 57551 New Orleans, LA 70157

www.LARPrail.com

July-August 2022 Newsletter

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Amtrak

National Happenings

The House T&I Committee proposed an Amtrak budget for next fiscal year of \$2.3 billion, considerably less than the \$3 billion proposed by the Biden administration. Amtrak received \$2.7 billion for FY22 in stand-alone funding not including IJIA infrastructure funding. It's entirely possible that the proposed \$2.3 billion will be raised further in the legislative process either by the full House or the Senate, but the likelihood of budgets being passed in the normal manner are slim due the recent all-Democratic passage of the Inflation Reduction Act. Senate Republicans have already said they won't pass budgets in the normal manner because of the passage of this act, but this being an election year who knows what will happen. A budget shutdown probably won't happen on October 1st and likely there will be a Continuing Resolution (C.R.) passed on a temporary basis. If a C.R. passes Amtrak will probably receive the same \$2.7 billion as they received in FY22.

Amtrak has been having real problems over the summer operating trains. The company is very short on personnel and can't maintain enough cars to keep the trains properly equipped. There have been random cancellations of several trains sporadically due to maintenance, or cancellation of sleeping car lines or trains sent out without a dining car. Many of these labor problems have been of Amtrak's own making by insisting on furloughing employees to cut costs, even though they received enough in covid relief funding to keep everyone on the payroll. Amtrak is now trying to hire 4,000 employees, most of them centered around Chicago, to catch up on car maintenance. Amtrak maintenance operations in Chicago have had reliability issues for several years and the shortage of labor is only making matters worse. Hiring 4,000 people won't be a quick or easy solution as it will take quite some time for these new hires to be trained. It may be a year or two before Amtrak's national operations are back to any semblance of normalcy.

Amtrak intends on restoring daily service on both the *Crescent* and *CITY of New Orleans* routes the week of October 2. Both trains are currently operating five-days-a-week and have been for several months now with Amtrak's justification for cutting frequencies being a lack of trained crews. The New York to Miami *Silver Meteor* will come back online during that same week as well. A lack of equipment shouldn't delay the resumption of daily service on these trains as trains operating in the East don't depend upon Chicago, and equipment can be maintained at New Orleans. Trains can be maintained at New Orleans, New York, and Miami – and the labor shortage at other locations is not nearly as acute at these locations as they are at Chicago.

The schedule for the *CITY of New Orleans* is being adjusted into mid-October due to CN track work. Trains will operate 30-60 minutes later than normal to accommodate the work.

On Time Performance

For June, on-time performance was 73.5% with long-distance at 34.5%. CP earned a grade of 'A' grade, BNSF and CSX a 'B', CN a 'D', and UP and NS an 'F.' For July, on time performance was 70.2% with long distance at just 33.6%. CP earned an 'A', BNSF and CSX a 'B', CN a 'C', and UP and NS an 'F'.

Route Name	Jun22 OT%	Jun22 Delay/Rider	Jul22 OT%	Jul22 Delay/Rider
<i>CITY of New Orleans</i>	23.1%	102 minutes	35.1%	84 minutes
<i>Crescent</i>	39.8%	141 minutes	46.5%	92 minutes
<i>Sunset Limited</i>	8.0%	206 minutes	10.0%	145 minutes
<i>Texas Eagle</i>	35.1%	113 minutes	33.1%	109 minutes

June was terrible for on-time performance, perhaps the worse ever for Amtrak's national system. Most of the freight railroads were in a full meltdown with an inability to move Amtrak or even their own freight trains. July was only marginally better than June with delays to passengers down somewhat. Preliminary performance for August seems to be better still, especially with the *Crescent*.

Gulf Coast Restoration

The Surface Transportation Board's hearings on the Gulf Coast are on hold for the moment as all the parties (railroads, ports, and Amtrak) have agreed to a 30-day mediation. Amtrak has resisted such moves in the past but agreed this time as they must view the possibility of a deal to be very likely. Once an agreement is reached then work can finally start to make the trains a reality. The Southern Rail Commission has \$66 million on hand for upgrades, and whatever is agreed upon for infrastructure upgrades the difference can come from the Federal Railway Administration IJA infrastructure fund. If the mediation fails then likely the Surface Transportation Board will impose an amount for upgrades. There is a lot of track work to do, crossing circuits to move back, and stations to build new or refurbish. Bay St. Louis is the only city that has started work to refurbish its depot, but Gulfport, Biloxi, Pascagoula have not started work yet. A new depot in Mobile will need to be constructed, and the site has yet to be chosen. The perfect spot for the Mobile depot would be in/near the Convention Center.

Baton Rouge/Shreveport to Meridian Train

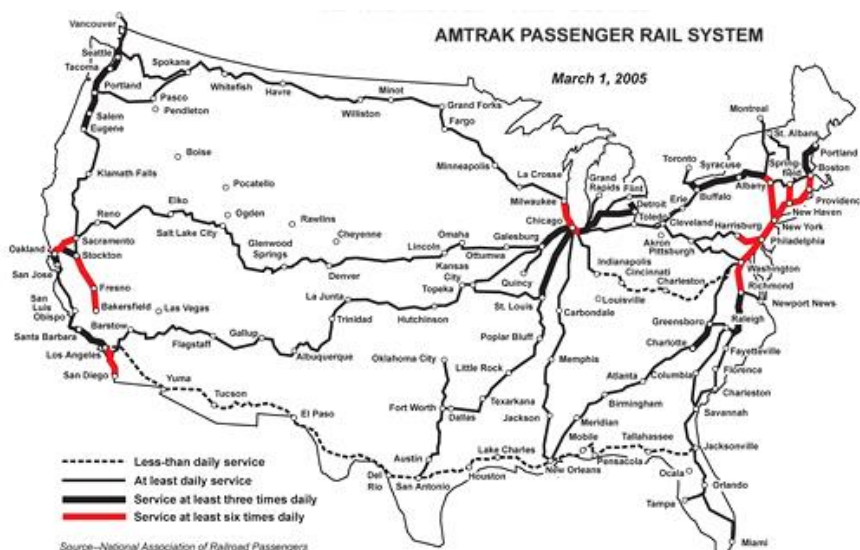
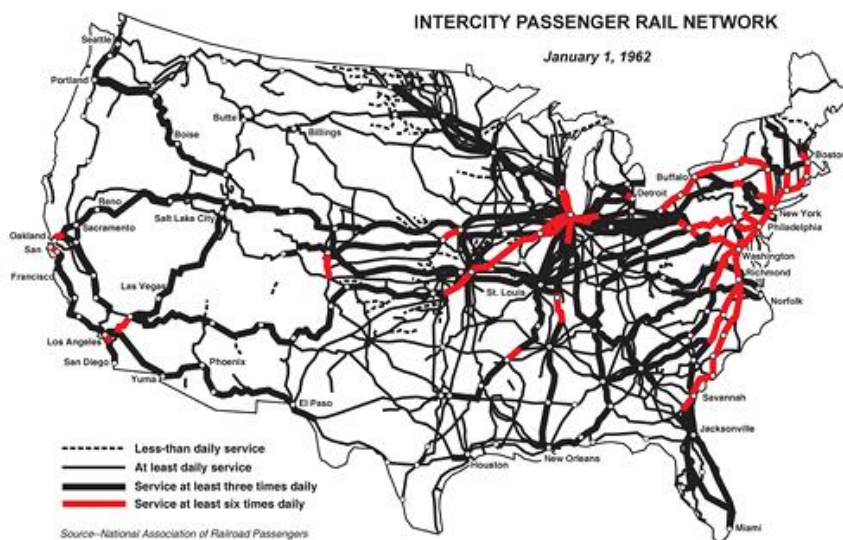
The Baton Rouge route has received a \$20 million federal grant to build train stations in Baton Rouge and Gonzales. Baton Rouge is receiving about \$13 million with Baton Rouge contributing about \$3 million more, and Gonzales receiving about \$5 million with Gonzales contributing \$2 million. The station in Baton Rouge is planned to be built near Government Street, and the Gonzales depot in the heart of downtown fronting Ascension Street. There is still no word about the other station stops planned for LaPlace and the one planned for Jefferson Parish. The New Orleans Airport Authority is seeking federal funding of \$85 million to build a connecting road from a potential Jefferson Parish depot to the airport. There hasn't been funding yet or a location specifically decided for this airport depot, but previous plans had a stop located near the old Zephyr stadium.

Although the Canadian Pacific is open to the idea of hosting Amtrak trains, there will need to be a lot of work done to make the trains a reality. The old 10-mph wooden trestle across the spillway will need to be replaced with a modern bridge, passing sidings will need to be installed especially around the petro-chemical plants, and the track upgraded to allow for 79-90 mph operations. The many blind grade crossings are going to need to be addressed before Amtrak trains can operate at these very fast speeds.

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. LARP’s website is back with full functionality to be restored soon.
- Brightline’s project completion to Orlando has been delayed until the first quarter of 2023 instead of the end of this year.
- The Texas Central project between Dallas and Houston may be in trouble as reports are that top management has left and the board of directors has disbanded. Land acquisitions for the project are also reported to have nearly ceased.

Maps of passenger trains in 1962 & 2005, showing the decline in service. The 2005 map isn’t much different than now except for New Orleans to Jacksonville. When Amtrak took over in 1971 about 2/3 of what was left of the private system was discontinued. There were more Amtrak cuts over the years, but at least what we have left is federally protected. The maps are by Malcolm Kenton.



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 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, September 10, 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 _____

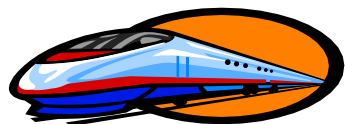
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