

Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers

P.O. Box 57551 New Orleans, LA 70157

www.LARPrail.com

September-October 2022 Newsletter

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Amtrak

National Happenings

Amtrak is still having problems operating a national network. First it was the shortage of operating crews that caused them to cut frequencies, and now it's a shortage of employees that work on maintaining the trains that Amtrak says is causing problems. Keep in mind that Amtrak laid off thousands of employees during covid even though they received billions more in federal supplemental funding. So now many of the trains are still operating at reduced capacity because Amtrak says the equipment can't be properly maintained. The *Sunset Limited* is operating with only two coaches and one sleeping car, and Amtrak seems content with operating a shrunken-down train with extremely limited capacity. The *Crescent* is operating with just three coaches instead of four and has been operating with reduced coach capacity for a couple of years now. Amtrak should have enough Viewliner sleeping cars to add another sleeper to the *Crescent*, but they haven't made any moves to increase capacity. The lack of equipment would be a reason for Amtrak to discontinue trains – they've already decreased capacity.

A railroad strike was averted in September when several major unions approved of the railroad proposals, but the track workers have rejected the agreement. If they choose to strike as early as December, the other unions will honor their strike and picket as well.

Daily Service Restored/Dining Service

The first week of October saw the reinstatement of daily service on both the *Crescent* and *CITY of New Orleans* trains. Amtrak had cut them back to five days a week in January due to the lack of qualified employees and had said the trains would be reinstated to daily operation in July. Several trains were reinstated in July but not these two. At one time Amtrak was selling space for mid-September but moved it back again three weeks to October. The *Silver Meteor* train was also restored the second week of October after the passage of Hurricane Ida in Florida.

Amtrak cut all dining cars on the eastern long-distance trains on July 1, 2019, and at the time said the cuts were permanent. There had been a provision in the previous Amtrak Authorization that mandated that food service break even (no federal funds to subsidize dining service). However, the IIJA Bipartisan Infrastructure Law struck that provision, so Amtrak is now free to use federal dollars to operate dining service. Amtrak has been attempting to hire employees to reinstate dining car service in the East, but it's like a brand-new service since it has been gone for a full three years. There are reports of two Viewliner dining cars in Miami that Amtrak is using to train employees, and they plan to reintroduce dining service on the two Florida trains as early as December. With the *Crescent*, there are reports that Amtrak is having problems hiring enough employees at New Orleans to reinstate service on this train. Amtrak has two dining cars at New Orleans and plans to start training employees once they

have enough qualified new hires. In the meantime, Amtrak has removed the dining car from the *CITY of New Orleans* with no stated date of return.

On Time Performance

For August, on-time performance was 71.0% with long-distance at 38.4%. CP earned a grade of 'A' grade, BNSF-CSX-CN-NS a 'B', and UP an 'F.' For September, on time performance was 73.7% with long distance at 44.8%. Like with August, in September CP earned a grade of 'A' grade, BNSF-CSX-CN-NS a 'B', and UP an 'F.'

Route Name	Aug22 OT%	Aug22 Delay/Rider	Sep22 OT%	Sep22 Delay/Rider
<i>CITY of New Orleans</i>	39.8%	84 minutes	48.5%	63 minutes
<i>Crescent</i>	57.4%	67 minutes	61.2%	55 minutes
<i>Sunset Limited</i>	6.5%	177 minutes	8.9%	165 minutes
<i>Texas Eagle</i>	28.3%	125 minutes	25.6%	102 minutes

Amtrak measures on-time performance with a 15-minute scale over an entire route with all stations considered.

The *Sunset Limited* and *Texas Eagle* trains had serious issues with freight interference from their host railroads. The *Sunset Limited* was the worst train in the national system as far as on-time performance. On the other hand, the *Crescent* improved dramatically starting in August and continuing through September (and into October). There may be multiple reasons for *Crescent* operator Norfolk Southern's improvement – one is the implementation of a new operating plan, and the other is a new CEO took over.

Gulf Coast Restoration

There still has not been a resolution to the reinstatement of gulf coast Amtrak service. There have been periods of ordered Surface Transportation Board (STB) mediation between Amtrak and the railroads/ports, and then extensions of that mediation, but still no agreement. It would appear that the railroads/ports strategy is to drag out and delay the reinstatement of Amtrak service. The next step is for the STB to make a ruling, and STB meetings are scheduled for mid-November that will hopefully resolve the issue. The STB can order the railroads to operate the Amtrak trains (or not), and perhaps even mandate an infrastructure amount that must be paid before the trains can run. If the STB mandates that the railroads operate the Amtrak trains with or without infrastructure upgrades, the railroads may appeal the ruling in federal court – so even if the STB rules our way doesn't mean the railroads will comply without a fight. An appeal of a potential STB ruling against them would fit in with their strategy of delaying Amtrak expansion. Regardless of what the STB rules the line isn't yet ready for Amtrak service as only Bay St. Louis has completed upgrades to its depot.

Baton Rouge/Shreveport to Meridian Train

There has been no recent news on the Baton Rouge train. The state of Louisiana has applied to the FRA for infrastructure funds to complete the necessary upgrades to the KCS/CP line and CP has offered to operate one round trip without upgrades. But there hasn't been any movement to take them up on their offer – besides, there aren't any train stations on the line except for New Orleans.

There also hasn't been any movement on Shreveport to Meridian, although this highly desired corridor is wanted by north Louisiana and Mississippi officials. The CP railroad has offered to operate Amtrak service on this route once a study has been completed to make the necessary upgrades, but the study is likely at least several months away from being started.

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.
- The Texas Department of Transportation has made the first steps to apply for some of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law money to increase Amtrak service in the state. This is a huge move for Texas given their current political environment, but a state match will be required in order to receive the federal funds.
- The Federal Railway Administration (FRA) is initiating an IIJA Bipartisan Infrastructure Law study of expanding the long-distance network. The IIJA mandated that this study be completed. Hopefully the FRA can motivate Amtrak management and the Amtrak Board to support expanding this needed service.



KCS train 10 at New Orleans Union Passenger Terminal in November, 1967. This was the secondary train to the Southern Belle and provided good day time service between New Orleans and Shreveport. Formerly known as the *Flying Crow*, this train combined with the train from Port Arthur, TX, at Shreveport and terminated at Kansas City. Photo by Roger Puta.

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, November 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

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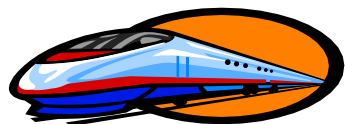
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