

# Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers

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

## March-April 2024 Newsletter

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### Amtrak

#### National Happenings

The divided Congress finally passed some funding bills that go through the end of the fiscal year in September. They passed a transportation bill that includes \$2.42 billion for Amtrak with just a \$16 million cut over last year. This is a really good result considering that just six months ago Republicans in Congress had considered cutting Amtrak by 64%.

#### Dining Car Service

There is still no word when dining car service will be restored to the *Crescent* and *CITY of New Orleans*. So far in the East only the Florida trains have had dining service reinstated. Amtrak is charging very high sleeping car fares for both the *Crescent* and *CITY* with premium passengers still receiving less than the best onboard food service.

#### Equipment

Equipment is starting to trickle out of Amtrak’s Beech Grove facility with about 4-5 cars per week – so far with mostly cosmetic upgrades. Amtrak has a long way to go but at least there is notable progress being made. Amtrak also has been refreshing the interiors of the cars with new fabrics. And with the new ALC-42 locomotives Siemens has finally identified the main cause of the breakdowns, and supposedly it can be fixed with a software upgrade. The new locomotives are actually very quiet and seem to accelerate better than the old P-42s.

#### On Time Performance

For February overall, on time performance was 79.1% with long distance at 57.7%. For the month, CPKC-CN/IC earned a grade of ‘A’ while CSX-BNSF-NS-UP earned a ‘B.’ For March overall, on-time performance was 79.9% with long-distance at 57.8%. For March again CPKC-CN/IC earned a grade of ‘A’ while CSX-BNSF-NS-UP earned a ‘B.’

Route Name	Feb24 OT%	Feb24 Delay/Rider	Mar24 OT%	Mar24 Delay/Rider
<i>CITY of New Orleans</i>	79.7%	87 minutes	71.0%	49 minutes
<i>Crescent</i>	55.6%	60 minutes	55.7%	74 minutes
<i>Sunset Limited</i>	51.1%	87 minutes	55.9%	101 minutes
<i>Texas Eagle</i>	80.6%	51 minutes	67.8%	85 minutes

The *Texas Eagle* had a really good February in that it actually met Amtrak's 80% on time standard for the first time in many years. The *CITY* also had a good February. Amtrak measures on-time performance with a 15-minute scale over an entire route with all stations considered.

### **Gulf Coast Restoration**

The city of Mobile is supposed to decide on allowing the construction of a temporary train station in early May. The city must also again agree to fund the \$3 million over three years that they previously agreed to fund. Amtrak now says they plan to start service in October with two frequencies per day, leaving both New Orleans and Mobile at 6:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. with about a 4-1/2 hours running time. The trains will be operating without track/siding upgrades initially with a far slower running time than is optimal. The train consists will be one locomotive and three coaches seating 70 passengers each.

### **Baton Rouge**

There is no word on the status of the Baton Rouge train. The last news was with the previous governor John Bel Edwards signing an agreement with Amtrak to operate the trains, but it's still unknown what views the new governor Jeff Landry has of the train.

### **The Future of Passenger Rail**

The system of passenger trains still operating today is a remnant of the failing trains that were still running in 1971, and in all of those 50 years afterward there has never been a national plan to expand the system – until now. The Federal Railroad Administration released its plan to expand, but the problem is those new routes are decades away if implementation goes according to the timeline set by the agency. We need these routes in the near future, like within the next 5-10 years. Amtrak isn't planning on expansion of the national system at all – so the impetus for expansion is going to have to come from outside of Amtrak. We need more routes, more frequencies, and much faster trains than we have now.

The freight network that Amtrak operates over is at (or over) capacity for the infrastructure they have in place, so any new routes or current route upgrades is going to have to be fully funded. There are a couple of ways route upgrades can happen, either through direct funding or tax credits to the railroad corporations to make the improvements. If we desire fast and frequent trains the infrastructure is going to have to be radically upgraded or built new. Many of the historic routes Amtrak operates over are very old alignments full of tight curves (sawtooth profile) built well before heavy earth-moving equipment was invented – so it would likely be impractical if not impossible to upgrade these curvy routes for 90-110 mph trains. When most railroads were first operating streamlined trains in the 1940s-50s the fastest achievable average speeds were about 50 mph – some routes with double track and fairly straight alignments averaged 60 mph. The current routes likely could be upgraded again to 50-60 mph average speeds but anything beyond that would likely require a new modern alignment. The table below shows what sort of running times could happen with increased average speeds. Mileages are approximate.

<b>Route</b>	<b>Mileage</b>	<b>Avg 50 mph</b>	<b>Avg 60 mph</b>	<b>Avg 70 mph</b>	<b>Avg 90 mph</b>	<b>Avg 160 mph</b>
Crescent	1400	28 hours	23.3 hours	20 hours	15.5 hours	8.75 hours
CITY	900	18 hours	15 hours	12.8 hours	10 hours	5.6 hours
Sunset Limited	2000	40 hours	33.3 hours	28.6 hours	22.2 hours	12.5 hours

The railroad operated Crescent (Southerner) made the trip to New York in about 28 hours, the original streamlined Sunset Limited in 42 hours, and the CITY in just under 16 hours (double track with 90-100 mph speeds). What is currently operated by Amtrak today isn't near as fast as what the railroads were operating 70 years ago.

## 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. Also, LARP’s website is now back up and operating. News can be posted, and plans are to set up an email list where members can be quickly contacted. Dues can also be quickly and safely paid on the website.
- Brightline West broke ground on its high-speed train from southern California to Las Vegas. The \$16 billion project will have electric trains operating at nearly 200 mph, and the hope is that the trains will be in service in time for the 2028 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles.
- Amtrak ran a test train Chicago to Carbondale to evaluate a shunt enhancement device. If successful, this device would ensure that crossing signals would activate, allowing shorter non-Superliner trains to operate on this corridor. This potentially would allow the redeployment of 14 Superliners to the national system.



Amtrak’s westbound Sunset Limited crossing the Huey Long bridge on the Westbank. Photo by Amtrak.

## 2024 LARP Officers

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

***Dues were payable January 1, 2024.***

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 be at NOUPT in the second-floor conference room Saturday, May 11 2024, 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](mailto:jsitajr@gmail.com).



### LARP Membership Application

Single member \$20     Family Member \$30

Name \_\_\_\_\_

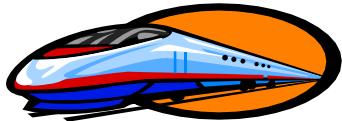
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