

Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers

P.O. Box 57551 New Orleans, LA 70157

www.LARPrail.com

November-December 2024 Newsletter

John Sita, Jr.—Editor

jsitajr@gmail.com

Amtrak

National Happenings

Donald Trump winning the presidency again, along with Republicans keeping control of the House and now taking the Senate, will impact Amtrak going forward. The new appointee for Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy is a former Congressman from Wisconsin that voted against Amtrak at every opportunity. Duffy speaks of highways and airports without mentioning rail at all. And Trump was not friendly to passenger rail the first time around as he proposed eliminating the entire national network. Elon Musk, who has been critical of passenger rail in the past, is supposed to be leading some kind of government efficiency committee that will recommend budget cuts. We do believe that there will be an effort made to cut Amtrak or possibly to eliminate it entirely. However, Amtrak still enjoys strong bipartisan support in Congress and has friends in the GOP Senate (Bill Cassidy, Roger Wicker, Jerry Moran, and others). And the fractured House is barely under GOP control and the Speaker will have to negotiate with Democrats to get anything done. We likely will all be writing the Trump administration and Congress asking them to save Amtrak.

Amtrak says that its ticket revenue for the year ending September 30th was up 6% over 2019 while ridership was up 1% (basically flat). But long-distance ridership was actually down 6%, mostly due to the lack of equipment. Sleeping car fares have been sky high with ridership being somewhat stable, hence the revenue increases. However, Amtrak is likely close to pricing itself out of the market with their exorbitant 1st class fares. Some of the smaller roomette accommodation charges were going for \$2,000-\$3,000 one way for cross-country trains. State-supported trains were also down by the same 6% over 2019 – some of these short-distance trains were negatively affected by changes in commuting patterns. Keep in mind that expenses have increased over this same time period, perhaps nearly as much as the revenue increases.

Equipment

There still hasn't been any movement on a long-distance car order, and now it's not expected to happen until July, 2025 at the earliest. The delay comes from the specifications that Amtrak has developed, and they are getting pushbacks from vendors about what is feasible or not. Trying to make the consists fixed or adding elevators in new bilevel cars is proving to be difficult for vendors. Building new cars should not be a difficult issue, especially if they plan to replace or augment the current fleet. Amtrak already has the designs for Superliners and Viewliners, so building modern cars to these specifications shouldn't be that hard. Amtrak should have been building cars all along instead of waiting until their fleet is practically worn out to even begin the process. New cars will likely take ten years or more to be delivered, and that's assuming that the incoming Trump administration doesn't claw back the money.

On Time Performance

For September overall, on time performance was 76.0% with long distance at 58.7%. For the month, CPKC and NS earned a grade of 'A' while CN/IC-CSX-BNSF-NS-UP earned a 'B'. For October overall, on-time performance was 74.5% with long-distance at 55.9%. For October, CPKC and NS earned a grade of 'A' while CN/IC-CSX-BNSF-NS-UP earned a 'B'.

Route Name	Sep24 OT%	Sep24 Delay/Rider	Oct24 OT%	Oct24 Delay/Rider
<i>CITY of New Orleans</i>	55.0%	96 minutes	65.6%	79 minutes
<i>Crescent</i>	64.1%	82 minutes	73.0%	66 minutes
<i>Sunset Limited</i>	60.4%	57 minutes	60.7%	70 minutes
<i>Texas Eagle</i>	53.3%	71 minutes	51.2%	67 minutes

The on-time performance is for all stations. These two months were a remarkable improvement, especially the *Crescent*, but all of the trains were improved. Just a year ago the *Sunset Limited* was running in the single digits and the *Crescent* in the teens or low twenties.

Gulf Coast Restoration/Baton Rouge

There is no significant movement on the Gulf Coast. Mobile had their official groundbreaking in late October for the pocket track and a minimal station shelter, but it could take six months to complete both. Officials had hoped to have the trains running in time for the Superbowl but there is no way now that is going to happen. We're not really sure why the Superbowl was chosen as a goal to have the trains operating as very few of these high-rolling and rich game attendees would ride Amtrak into the game. If they came by rail they would likely come in on their private cars. Anyway, Amtrak still doesn't have signed agreements with Louisiana and Mississippi, and the \$178 million used for upgrades is likely hinged upon getting all of these agreements in place first. At least the new Landry administration in Louisiana has not terminated Louisiana's involvement in the project and they are continuing to move forward.

There is no movement with Baton Rouge at all. If you remember the CPKC offered to operate one frequency per day before upgrades were made, but officials are concerned with the gulf coast now with Baton Rouge being a lesser priority currently. Baton Rouge did get study money from the FRA as all of the previous studies had become stale, but it's expected that the studies will pretty much keep to an all-CPKC routing. We're not sure how the Landry administration feels about subsidizing these trains (they have not expressed opposition to it), but we feel that it's important for the Gulf Coast trains to be done right. If they are considered a failure, then that will put off service to Baton Rouge for years if not decades more.

The Argument for Passenger Rail

Amtrak makes a significant economic impact in the areas that operates with passengers carried, wages paid, supplies ordered, etc. In fact, Amtrak generally returns \$4 dollars in economic benefits for every taxpayer dollar invested. Amtrak provides a nationwide economic impact of \$8 billion for its \$2 billion taxpayer subsidy. There are few other programs that are as economically beneficial, perhaps aerospace does, but Amtrak also provides utility and transportation. This is why competent government officials want passenger rail and recognize why it's important to invest in it. This is not a difficult or complex concept.

Rail doesn't have to capture a large segment of intercity passengers to be successful or to have a large impact. Europe is known for its good and comprehensive network of passenger trains, but at most they still only have 12% of the total transportation market. Most Europeans travel by car with only a relatively small segment of the population using rail, but still rail makes a huge impact. Not too many critics in Europe are going to say that

nobody rides the trains. The trains in Europe are so fast and convenient that they have displaced most short haul airline flights. The difference between Europe and the USA is the level of investment. If Amtrak had the same level of investment and carried 12% of intercity trips, that would put them on par with what domestic airlines currently carry.

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. Dues can also be quickly and safely paid on the website.
- There is a move among Republicans in Florida to invest in passenger rail, likely by partnering with Brightline or other private operators. These politicians are able to see the folly of relying strictly on automobiles for transportation. The current governor DeSantis is opposed to taxpayer funding for passenger rail, but the next governor may be more open to the idea. If you have driven on Florida’s highways recently then you know how much they need passenger rail.
- China broke its own speed record with one of their new high-speed trainsets hitting 400 km/hr. That is nearly 250 mph. A train that can maintain 250 mph between major stops could likely have an average speed of 180 mph or higher. This is a major breakthrough as most others had been in the 220 mph range, and this new trainset is very close to maglev speeds and can be built for much less cost than maglev.



A proposed map by BulletTrains USA.com - a network of trains this comprehensive would be game changing.

2024 LARP Officers

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

Dues were payable January 1, 2025.

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 Saturday, Jan 11, 2025, 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 _____

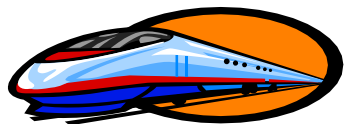
Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

I can work actively for LARP. Please contact me.

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



Louisiana Association of Railroad Passengers

P.O. Box 57551 New Orleans, LA 70157

**Address Service
Requested**