

Southern High-Speed Rail Commission

GULF COAST HIGH-SPEED RAIL CORRIDOR DESIGNATED IN 1998 BY CONGRESS.

The Southern High-Speed Rail Commission (SHSRC) was founded in 1981 with a mission to improve mobility and access for passenger rail users in Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi.

The state of Alabama:

- has been a member of the SHSRC for 26 years;
- provides funding through the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs; and
- provides technical assistance through the Alabama Department of Transportation

Current Alabama Commission members:

Governor Robert "Bob" Riley	Richard Finley	Joseph McInnes, AL DOT Director
Mayor Hoyt "Chip" Howell	Elizabeth S. Sanders	James W. "Bill" McFarland, Gov's.
Sherman L. Suits	Robert Lake	Designee

State of Alabama

State of Passenger Rail

INTERCITY PASSENGER RAIL

A VIABLE ALTERNATIVE

- Promotes economic development along rail corridors
- Improves air quality
- Provides transportation choices
- Provides transportation for non car owners
- Enhances hurricane evacuation routes
- Amtrak is the Gulf South's service provider

The SHSRC has helped garner over \$2.75M in federal funding for a rail track/highway grade separation project at Hamilton Boulevard and the CSX track in Mobile, Alabama.

Passenger rail is a cost effective transportation system that helps relieve highway congestion, improves emergency preparedness, reduces our dependence on foreign oil, and runs over an existing track network owned by freight railroads.

CURRENT LONG-DISTANCE TRAIN SERVICE / TERMINAL STATUS

The Crescent

Operated by Amtrak on the Norfolk Southern Corp. Railroad track

Route

New Orleans-Slidell-Picayune-Hattiesburg-Laurel-Meridian-Tuscaloosa-Birmingham-Anniston-Atlanta— Washington DC-New York City

Status of Terminals

Tuscaloosa - No renovations planned - Fully staffed station
Birmingham – Renovations soon to be initiated - Complete 2008-2009
Anniston – Renovations in 2007 - Non-staffed station

The Sunset Limited

Operated by Amtrak over the Burlington Northern, Santa Fe, Union Pacific Railroad and CSXT tracks.

Route

Los Angeles-Lake Charles-Lafayette-New Iberia-Schriever-New Orleans

The Sunset Limited east of New Orleans
Indefinitely Suspended since August 2005

Route

Bay St. Louis-Gulfport-Biloxi-Pascagoula-Mobile-Atmore-Pensacola-Tallahassee-Jacksonville-Orlando

Status of Terminals

Mobile, Alabama – Station demolished in 2006 - new platform within condo development planned
Atmore, Alabama – Non-staffed station

IMPROVING RAIL RIDERSHIP

The best way to increase the number of people using trains is to ensure on-time and frequent train service. If people know the service is reliable they can make a choice to use the train with confidence. Higher ridership decreases cost of new corridor service to states.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CORRIDOR SERVICE AND LONG-DISTANCE SERVICE?

Today Congress is pressing Amtrak for more accountability. Amtrak has responded by instituting performance measures to gauge the cost and benefits for each line they operate. Long-distance trains typically do not perform as well because they serve much longer, multi-state routes connecting numerous markets both small and large. Corridor trains have smaller service areas and typically connect major city pairs. The way of the future is to enhance some of the long-distance route segments with a series of corridor trains to provide improved service at peak travel times with a higher frequency of trains. States will be required to subsidize new corridor operating costs not covered by fare box revenues and contribute to capital upgrades as needed to support more frequent and/or higher speed passenger trains.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INTERCITY PASSENGER RAIL AND HIGH-SPEED RAIL?

The new Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 defines High-Speed Rail service as intercity passenger rail service that is reasonably expected to reach speeds of at least 110 miles per hour. Long distance trains currently servicing the Gulf South are limited to a maximum speed of 79 mile per hour. Higher speeds require greater investment to improve track structures, equipment and crossings to provide for the safe operation of a high-speed train.

SPECIAL CONCERNS - STATE

- **Problem:** There is a constitutional prohibition against expending public dollars on privately owned rail track. Most rail track is owned by the underlying host Class I railroad, a private corporation.
 - **Solution:** State legislatures can amend the State constitution to allow public sector investment where benefits to the public accrue from passenger rail operation over freight rail track. North Carolina's state legislature authorized this change successfully.
- **Problem:** The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 set multiple criteria to qualify and compete for Sec. 301. Capital Assistance for Intercity Passenger Rail Service (\$1.9B over 5 years) and Sec. 501. High-Speed Rail Corridor Program (\$1.5B over 5 years). A key requirement is State's must include passenger rail projects in their State Rail Plan as well as prove how their project will result in significant improvements in estimated ridership, increased on-time performance, reduced trip time, and additional service frequency to meet anticipated demand.
 - **Solution:** Each State Department of Transportation should quickly update and include identified passenger rail projects in their State Rail Plan making use of the Southern High-Speed Rail Commission's planning funds to evaluate corridors.
- **Problem:** There is no dedicated state funding for intercity passenger rail planning match.
 - **Solution:** State legislatures should identify innovative long-term funding sources to match SHSRC planning funds and support passenger rail corridor operations and capital improvements.
- **Problem:** There is a lack of state policy to support state owned right-of-way/rail corridors for the future of passenger rail.

- **Solution:** Establish state policy in State Transportation Plans to authorize the purchase freight rail right-of-way to preserve corridors for future passenger rail use where demand is developing.
- **Problem:** DOT and Amtrak policy is moving the country away from long-distance service, particularly on poor performing routes and toward State supported corridor service between City pairs of 150 to 500 miles.
 - **Solution:** States Transportation Committees must actively seek information and will play a critical role in dialogue and change.

SPECIAL PROBLEMS

- Loss of Amtrak long-distance service along the Mississippi Gulf Coast from New Orleans to Sanford, Florida since August 2005.

Solution: HR 2095 Sec. 226 Plan for Restoration of Service

Within 9 month after the date of enactment of this Act, Amtrak shall transmit to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure of the House of Representatives and the committee on commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate a plan for restoring passenger rail service between New Orleans, Louisiana, and Sanford, Florida. (end of June 2009)

- Alabama state gas tax is only authorized for highway and bridge work. Thus Alabama stands to lose federal appropriations of \$1.3M designated to study Alabama track needs for high-speed train service because there is no provision for a local match.

Solution: Alabama state legislature must actively seek to broaden the use of the state gas tax or find a dedicated alternate source of funds to provide the needed local planning match as well as operations and capital funds to support passenger rail.