

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 Mississippi:

- has been a member of the SHSRC for 26 years;
- legislature allocated funds for the administration of the Southern High-Speed Rail Commission and provides the local match for studies and capital projects; and
- provides technical assistance through the Mississippi Department of Transportation

Current Mississippi Commission members:

Governor Haley R. Barbour

Mayor John Robert Smith

Mayor Johnny Dupree

Kay Kell

Larry Brown, Sr., MsDOT

Gil Carmichael

Charles Ozier

State of Mississippi

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 garnered \$500,000 in federal funding for improvements to the proposed new Carriere siding/relieves congestion in Picayune, Mississippi.

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 SERVICE

The Crescent

Operated by Amtrak over 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

Picayune – unstaffed flag stop
Hattiesburg – \$10 million dollar renovation of historic depot completed in April, 2007.

Laurel – Historic train depot restoration complete in 1999.

Meridian – Historic Union Station restoration and establishment of multi-modal transportation terminal in December, 1997; catalyst for downtown revitalization

City of New Orleans

New Orleans to Chicago - Operated by Amtrak on the Canadian National Railroad track. Serves Louisiana and Mississippi. Not on the designated High Speed Rail Corridor.

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

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

Status of Terminals (damaged by Hurricane Katrina)

Bay St. Louis – minor platform damage

Gulfport – extensive damage to station, minor platform damage

Biloxi – minor platform and canopy damage

Pascagoula – Some damage to station platform. City repairs completed in 2007.

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 service 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

- **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 inter-city 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 PROBLEM

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. (June 2009).

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