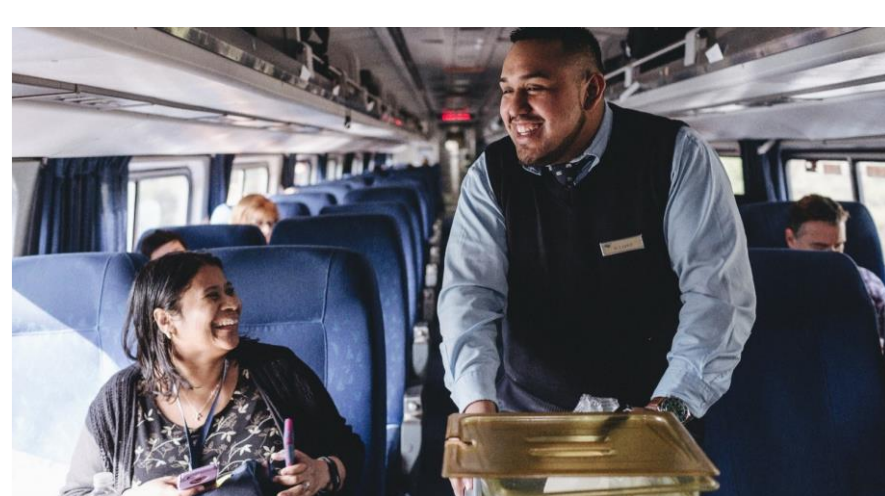




RPA RailNation: San Antonio Update

Oct. 4, 2025

T. L. Stennis III

Director of Government Affairs – South



Borealis

Borealis Route Development Timeline



- **2013:** MnDOT and WisDOT request Amtrak feasibility study
- **2015:** MnDOT contracts for railroad simulation modeling to determine infrastructure improvements and other pre-NEPA work
- **2019:** WisDOT begins completion of environmental clearance
- **2020:** WisDOT applies for operating support grant
- **2020:** WisDOT applies for CRISI grant for needed railroad improvements
- **2020-2024:** Grants awarded; states work on 1) securing budget for matches and operating support, and 2) state-to-state agreements
- **2024:** Service implemented!



Borealis Overview

- Launched May 21, 2024.
- One daily round trip, Minneapolis/St. Paul – Milwaukee – Chicago; travel time of seven-and-a-half hours.
- Serves existing stations along part of Long-Distance *Empire Builder's* route (Chicago – Portland / Seattle).
- State-Supported service sponsored by MN, WI, & IL; also receiving FRA Restoration and Enhancement operating assistance funding.
 - MN is first new state sponsor of an Amtrak route since 2009!



Launch Day in Red Wing, MN

Borealis Ridership

- Total passengers: 214,000 in first year
- Ridership significantly higher than forecast
- Top five station pairs:
 - Chicago – Minneapolis/St. Paul
 - Chicago – Milwaukee
 - Milwaukee – Minneapolis/St. Paul
 - Chicago – Milwaukee Airport
 - Chicago – La Crosse
- 93% of riders traveling between states
- Trains operating with high peak load factors



Passengers boarding in Milwaukee, WI—one of Borealis' highest-traffic stations.

Multistate Governance

- Sponsored by WI, MN, & IL state Departments of Transportation; the states have a great partnership with each other / Amtrak, which will continue to drive the success of the route going forward.
- Challenges prior to launching the service:
 - On a multi-sponsor route, decisions require more time with more decision-makers involved.
 - Each sponsor may have different perspectives and priorities; different statutory authority for contracting with Amtrak, etc.; and different budget cycles / timelines and funding availability.
- Potential alternative approach: for new multi-state (3+) routes, sponsors could consider a single multi-state entity that is empowered to contract with Amtrak and make business / operational decisions.
 - FRA's Interstate Rail Compact program is designed to stand up entities that can work to develop and sponsor such routes.

PARTNERS



Y'all Aboard! Amtrak Mardi Gras ServiceSM



New Orleans, LA



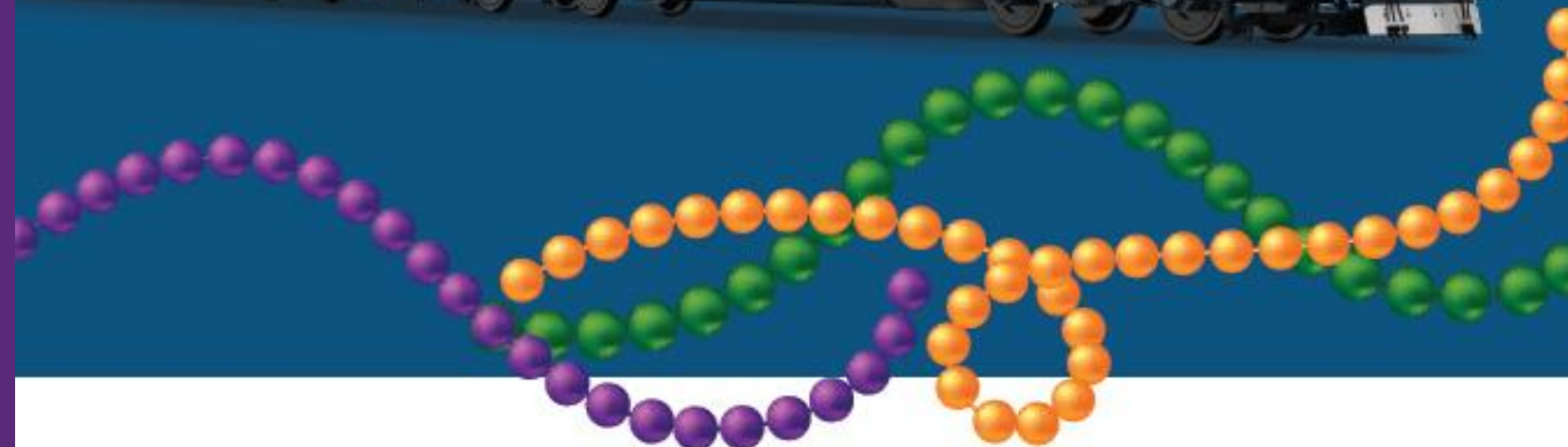
Bay Saint Louis, MS



Gulfport, MS

Twice-Daily Round-Trip Service

New Orleans
Bay Saint Louis
Gulfport
Biloxi
Pascagoula
Mobile



Biloxi, MS



Pascagoula, MS



Mobile, AL

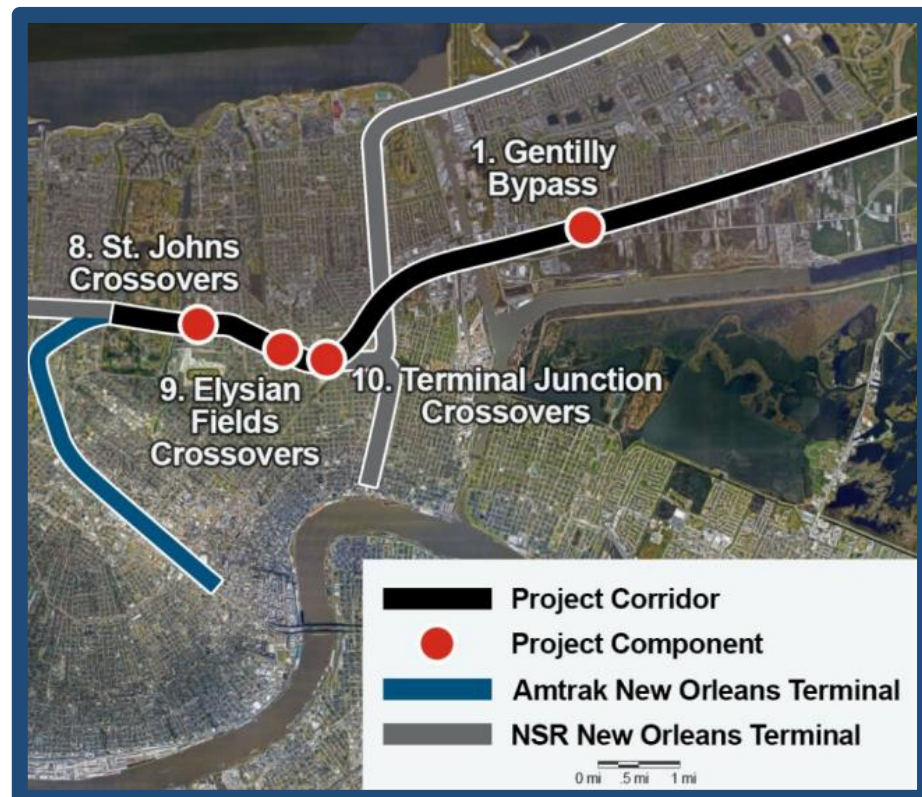
amtrak.com/mardigras

This service is financed in part through funds made available from the states of Louisiana, Mississippi and the City of Mobile, Alabama. Amtrak Mardi Gras ServiceSM is a registered trademark of the National Railroad Passenger Corporation.

AMTRAK
MARDI GRAS SERVICESM

Mardi Gras Pre-Service Funding

- Multiple rounds of federal grant funding received, with matching funds from Amtrak, state & local governments, and other partners:
 - Dec. 2023 – Up to \$500k in FY 22 CID grant funding awarded to the Southern Rail Commission.
 - Sept. 2023 — Up to \$178 million in FY 22 CRISI grant funding (plus \$44 million in additional partner funding matches) announced for track and signal improvements, grade crossing upgrades, and station improvements. **(Projects funded shown in maps below.)**
 - Previously — Up to \$9.8 million in R&E operating grants awarded, which LADOTD, MDOT, and City of Mobile have matched with an additional \$3.048 million each.



Mardi Gras Overview

- Twice-daily round-trips (morning, afternoon / evening) between New Orleans and Mobile; travel times of less than four hours.
- Connections to other trains:
 - *City of New Orleans* (NOL-CHI)
 - *Crescent* (NOL-ATL-WAS-NYP)
 - *Sunset Limited* (NOL-HOS-LAX)
- Coach & business class; Wi-Fi, café service (w/ select local products), & other amenities available. Pets welcome; fare discounts available.



PARTNERS



A State-Supported route, the **Mardi Gras** brings intercity passenger trains to communities that Amtrak had not served since Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Mardi Gras Schedule

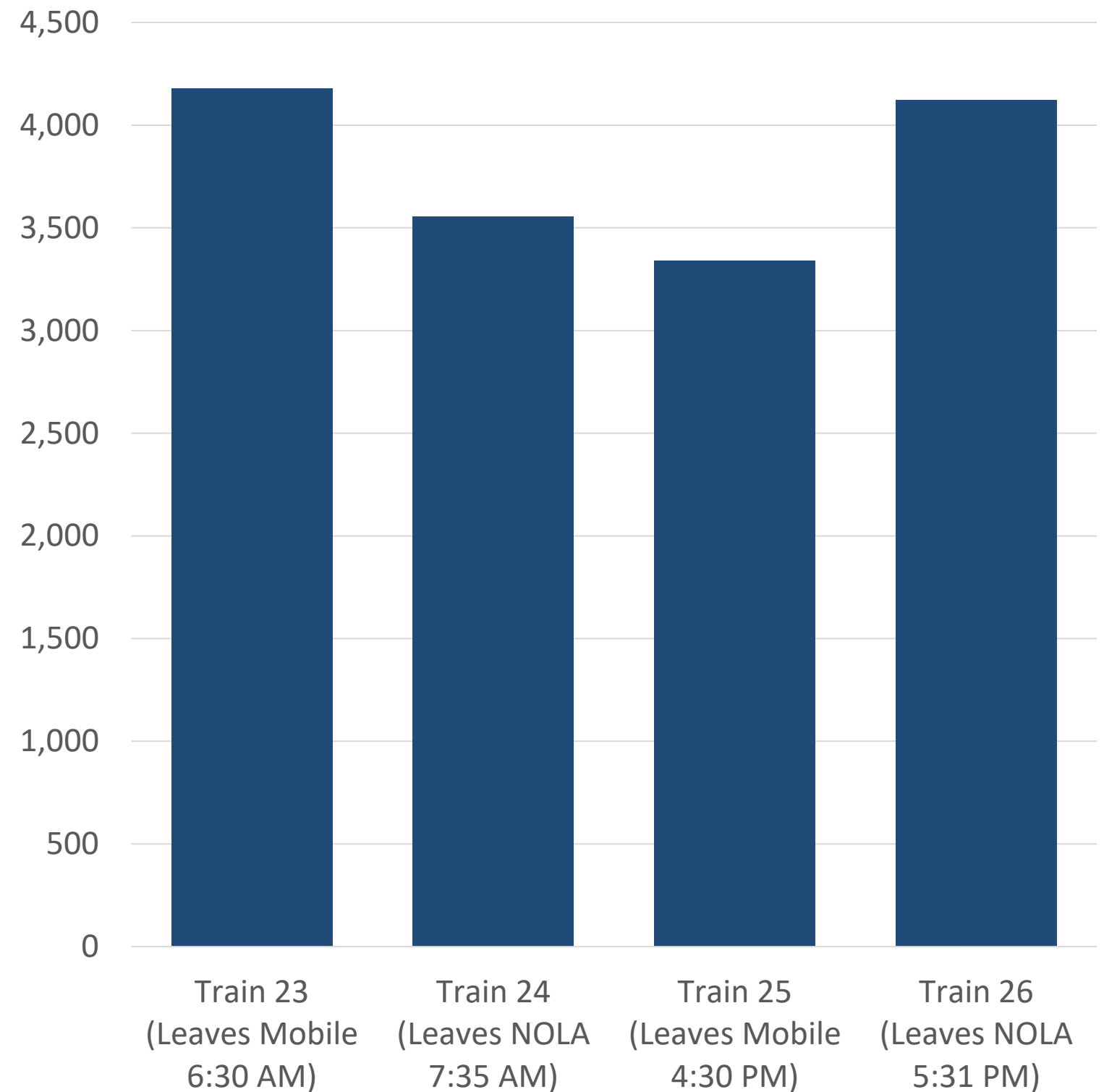
Eastbound	NOL	BAS	GUF	BIX	PAG	MOE
Amtrak Mardi Gras Service Train 24 Originates in NOL	7:35 AM	8:59 AM	9:31 AM	9:55 AM	10:29 AM	11:18 AM
Amtrak Mardi Gras Service Train 26 Originates in NOL	5:31 PM	7:00 PM	7:32 PM	7:56 PM	8:28 PM	9:14 PM

Westbound	MOE	PAG	BIX	GUF	BAS	NOL
Amtrak Mardi Gras Service Train 23 Originates in MOE	6:30 AM	7:13 AM	7:45 AM	8:11 AM	8:42 AM	10:30 AM
Amtrak Mardi Gras Service Train 25 Originates in MOE	4:30 PM	5:13 PM	5:48 PM	6:11 PM	6:42 PM	8:13 PM

Mardi Gras Ridership Snapshot

- Launch resulted in 337 news articles & 1B+ impressions, helping drive strong performance. In weeks one through five:
 - 15,200 total ridership
 - 434 average daily ridership
 - 61% average load factor
 - 72% peak load factor
- Customers praise comfort, convenience, and quality of on-board service; customer satisfaction index (CSI) scores exceed national averages.
- Most respondents report that this was their first-ever Amtrak trip.

Total Ridership to Date by Train

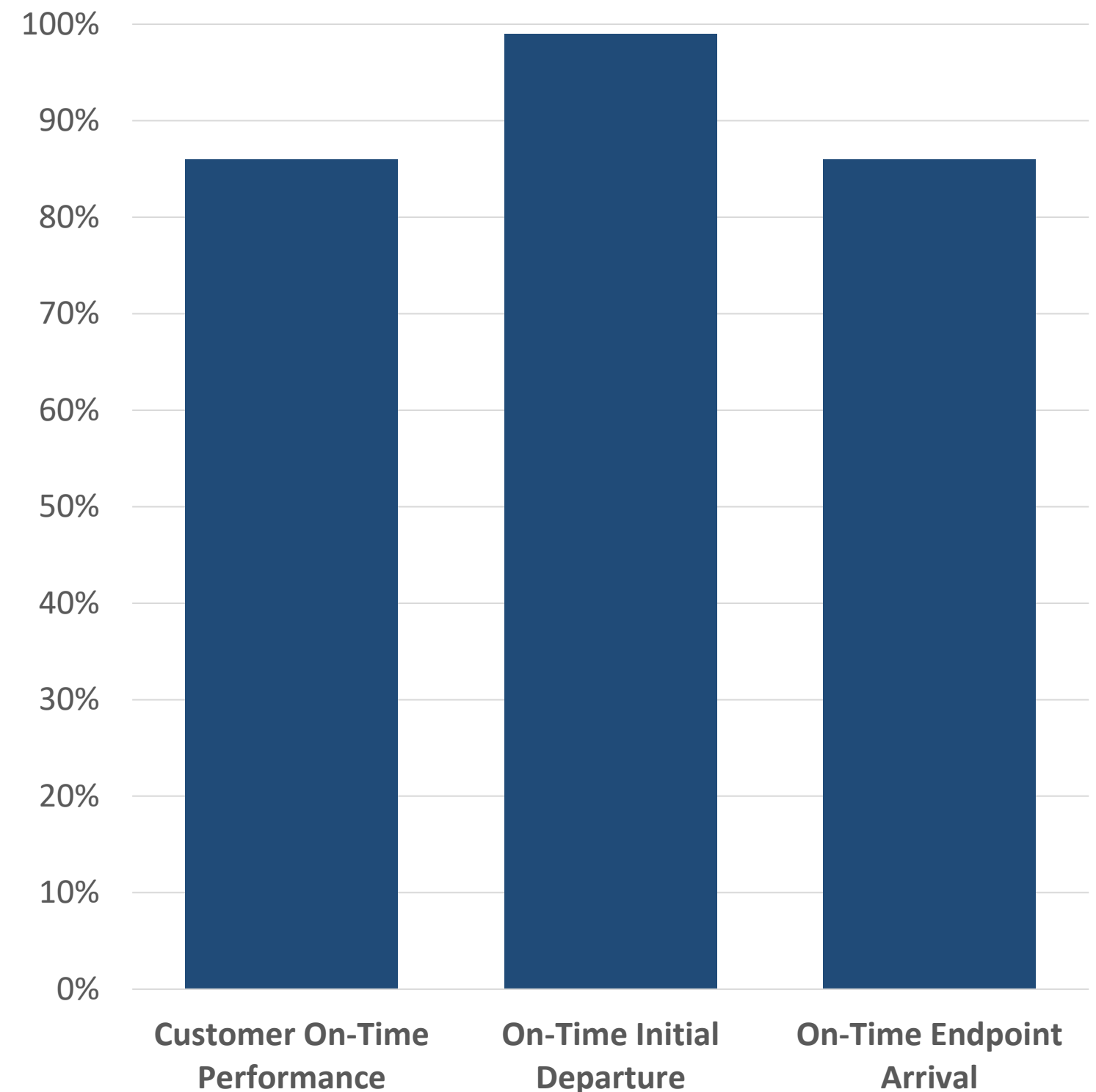


Preliminary data. Subject to change. Sample period: weeks 1-5 (8/18 – 9/21/25).

Mardi Gras Operational Snapshot

- In weeks one through five, vs. goal of 80%:
 - 86% customer on-time performance
 - 99% on-time departures from initial terminal
 - 86% on-time arrival at route's final stop
- Amtrak is facilitating a “hypercare” program to triage any issues that emerge in the initial days of operation to ensure the route starts off strong.

On-Time Performance Metrics to Date



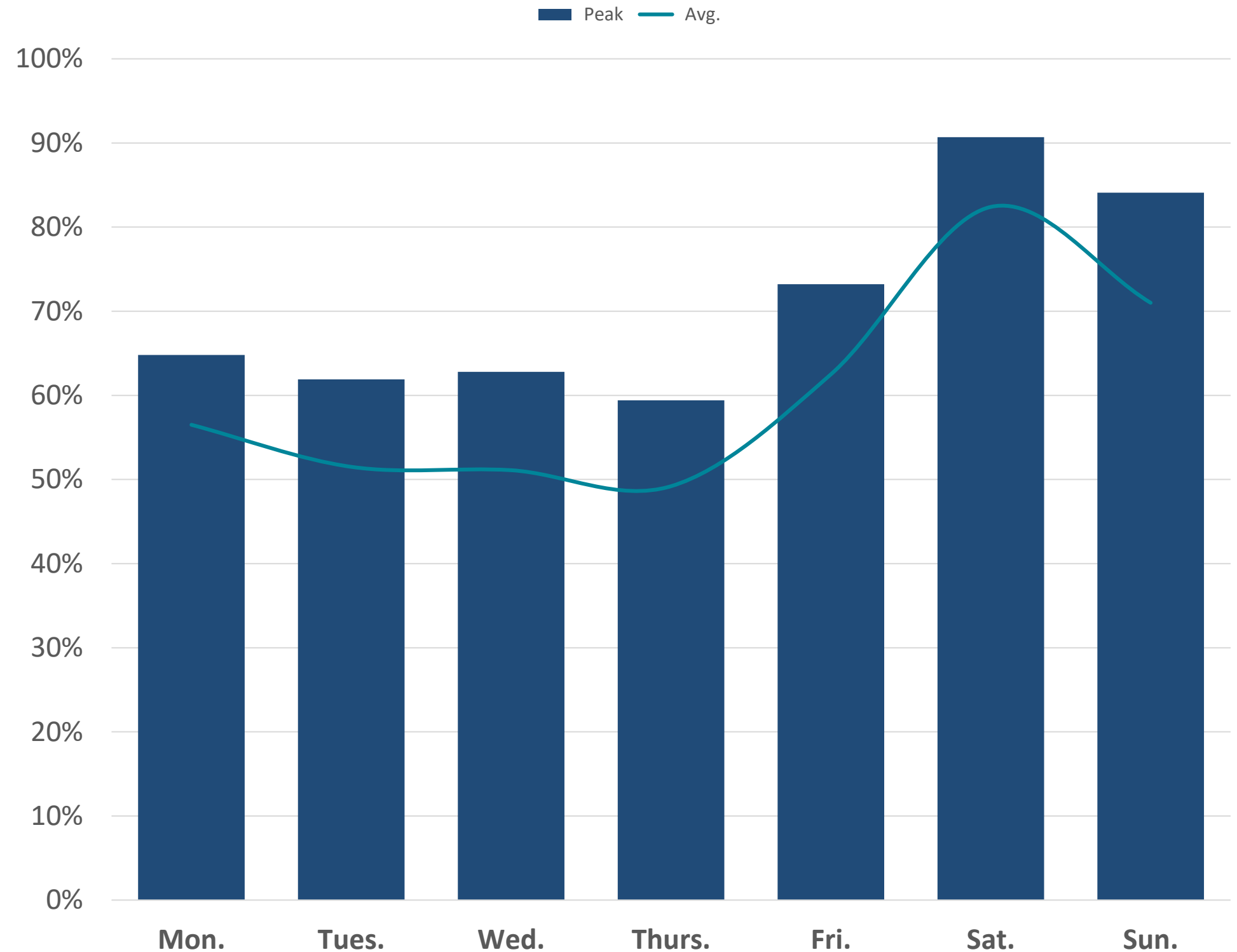
Preliminary data. Subject to change. Sample period: weeks 1-5 (8/18 – 9/21/25).

Mardi Gras Sales Snapshot

- Heaviest ridership on weekends.
- Most popular single day for travel is Saturday.
- High utilization of “Share Fares” discount (available for parties of three to eight people).



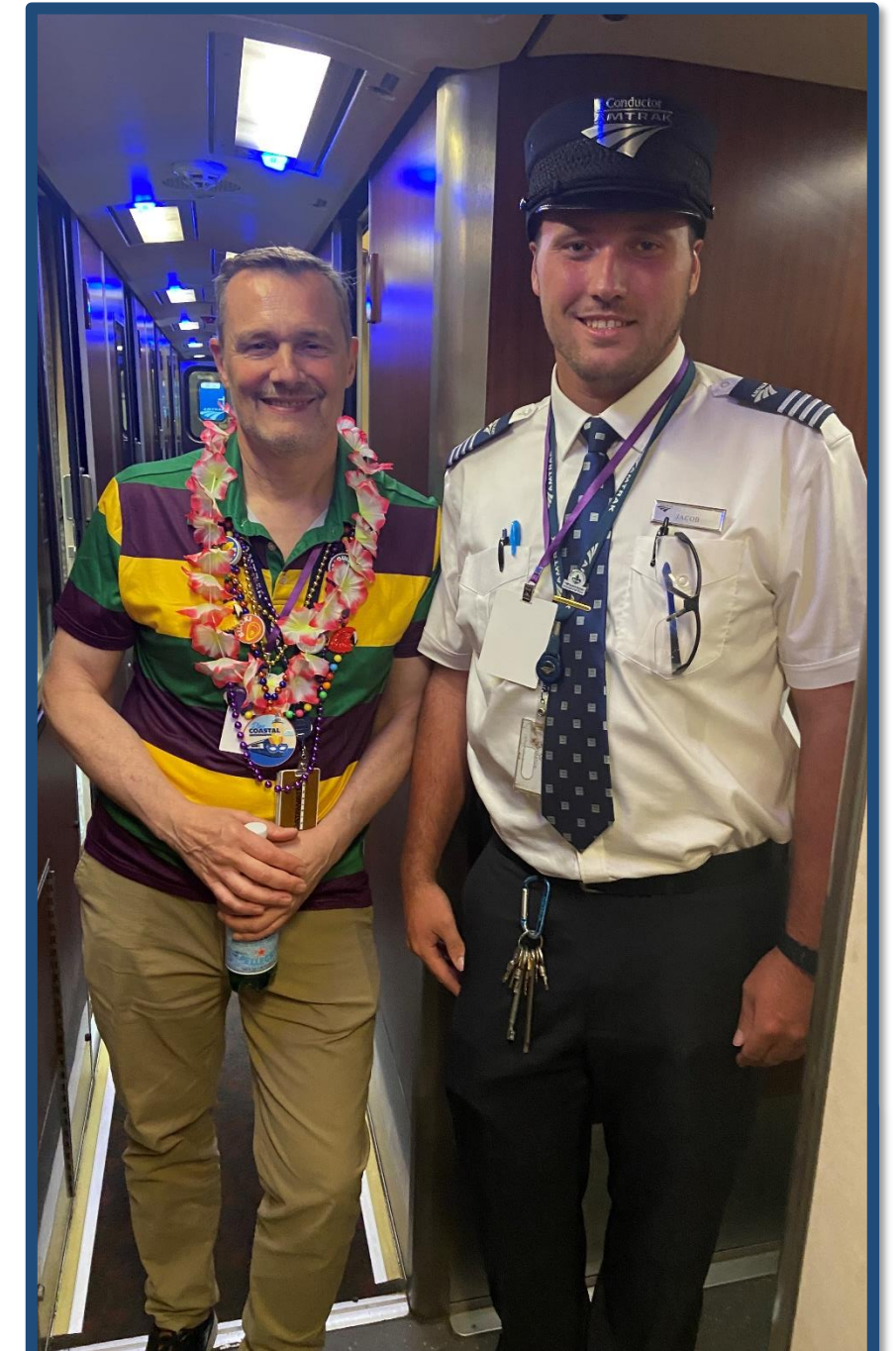
Load Factor to Date by Day of Week



Preliminary data. Subject to change. Sample period: weeks 1-5 (8/18 – 9/21/25).

Corridor Improvement Program (CRISI) Update

- RFP issued by Amtrak to onboard a designer of record for the station improvement projects at:
 - Pascagoula, MS
 - Biloxi, MS
 - Gulfport, MS
 - Bay Saint Louis, MS
- Preliminary engineering efforts are progressing for the CSX projects:
 - Gentilly Bypass
 - Claiborne Siding Ext'n
 - Beauvoir Siding Ext'n
 - Orange Grove Siding Ext'n
 - Theodore Power Turnouts
 - Brookley to Mobile Siding Ext'n
- In addition to CSX projects, Norfolk Southern, Mississippi DOT, and Port of Mobile projects will begin soon.



Amtrak President Roger Harris and Mardi Gras conductor Jacob Styron on inaugural day.

New Routes: Lessons Learned

- Potential Future Strategies

- For State-Supported routes under the current PRIIA 209 policy, Amtrak needs strong partnerships with states. Amtrak alone cannot deliver and maintain these services.
- For future routes with more than two state sponsors, a single contracting entity with Amtrak may be more efficient (e.g., federal compacts).
- For multi-state State-Supported routes, Amtrak will serve as applicant and grantee for new FRA Restoration and Enhancement (R&E) grants, which offset the state operating support needed with federal funds for up to the first six years of service.



Outside the Boston-to-Washington Northeast Corridor, Sec. 209 of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) requires that short- and middle-distance Amtrak routes (i.e., those less than 750 miles in length) be **State-Supported**; in other words, sponsoring partners fund the majority of those routes' costs and make decisions about schedule, frequency, and other aspects of service.

In FY 24, Amtrak's 31 State-Supported routes—shown in blue on the map above—carried 14.5 million passengers (almost half of total ridership) and generated half a billion dollars in gross ticket revenue.

The *Borealis* and *Mardi Gras*—Amtrak's two newest routes—are both State-Supported.

New State Sponsor Capacity

- Potential Future Strategies

- Clearly define division of responsibility to set expectations early.
- FRA can continually assess sponsor capacity to implement under CID process.
- Identify specific capabilities a sponsor needs to have to plan, implement, and manage a service.
- Consider formal role for State-Amtrak Intercity Passenger Rail Committee (SAIPRC) in multi-state routes and new sponsor onboarding.



Outside the Boston-to-Washington Northeast Corridor, Sec. 209 of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA) requires that short- and middle-distance Amtrak routes (i.e., those less than 750 miles in length) be **State-Supported**; in other words, sponsoring partners fund the majority of those routes' costs and make decisions about schedule, frequency, and other aspects of service.

In FY 24, Amtrak's 31 State-Supported routes—shown in blue on the map above—carried 14.5 million passengers (almost half of total ridership) and generated half a billion dollars in gross ticket revenue.

The *Borealis* and *Mardi Gras*—Amtrak's two newest routes—are both State-Supported.

Heartland Flyer



The Heartland Flyer, an Amtrak State-Supported train, provides one round trip daily between Oklahoma City and Fort Worth via five intermediate stops. The route is jointly funded by the Texas and Oklahoma state governments.



Map



Route Overview

Key Statistics

Ridership (FY 24)	80,371
Revenue (FY 24)	\$7.9 million
Operating Cost Recovery (FY 24)	82%
Frequency	1 round trip daily
On-Time Customers (in 12/24)	77%
Funding Partners	TxDOT & ODOT
Host Railroads (Major)	BNSF

Big Community Benefits

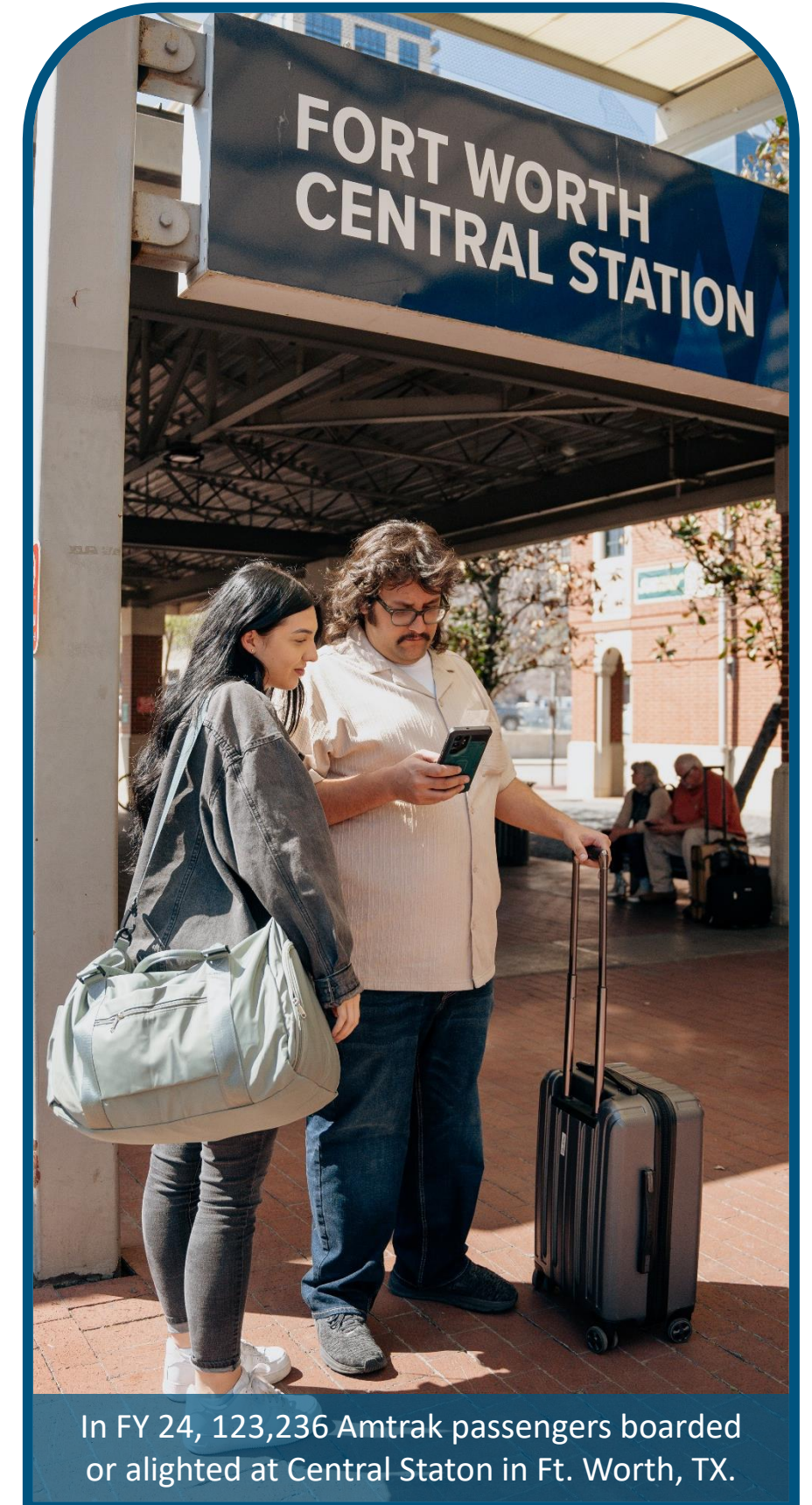
- **Good, Well-Paying Jobs:**
Supports Ft. Worth crew base & commissary (50 employees)
- **Major Economic Benefits:**
\$5.3M in direct benefits plus \$23.7M in economic activity
- **Valuable Connections:**
19% of passengers boarding or alighting in Ft. Worth also travel on connecting service

Strong FY 24 Performance

- **Record Ridership:**
+11% YOY (+8,000) & 17% higher than plan (+11,800)
- **Record Revenue:**
+11% YOY (+\$802,000) & 9% higher than plan (+\$623,000)
- **Strong Cost Recovery:**
+6pp YOY, +21pp vs. plan, & above national State-Supported average (82% vs. 77%)

Partners express interest in expanded service, including possible extension to Newton, KS, via Wichita.

- Oklahoma continues to provide its share of funding; for the first time since becoming a funding partner, Texas legislature this year did not provide funding.
- Approximately one year of operating support (\$3.6M) was secured via North Central Texas Council of Governments' (NCTCOG's) Regional Transportation Council.
- Continuing efforts to secure needed future funding:
 - Expand coalition beyond current supporters
 - Continue to explore funding options from all sources for balance of 2025 legislative biennium
 - Ensure TXDOT will request necessary level of funding for FY 27-28 with legislative support



National Overview

- Annual Funding
 - Full-year FY 26 funding level remains TBD.
 - Amtrak's request: \$2.427 billion
 - House & Senate have advanced competing bills
 - Amtrak services continue as normal: customers planning to travel on our trains in the coming days and weeks can be assured that we will remain open for business.
- Reauthorization
 - IIJA authorizations expire at the end of FY 26; Congress will need to reauthorize surface transportation programs and accounts.





Questions?

Thank you!

Continue the conversation:

T. L. Stennis III, Director, Government Affairs, NSR - Southern Region

TL.Stennis@amtrak.com | 504-579-4550

