



City of San Antonio

Agenda Memorandum

File Number:18-6208

Agenda Item Number: 48.

Agenda Date: 12/13/2018

In Control: City Council A Session

DEPARTMENT: Transportation & Capital Improvements

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Mike Frisbie, P.E.

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: Citywide

SUBJECT: Amtrak Sunset Limited Service

SUMMARY:

A resolution by the City Council of San Antonio, Texas supporting the Rail Passengers Association's request for Amtrak to increase the frequency of service of the Sunset Limited to daily as soon as practicable.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Rail Passengers Association (RPA), formerly known as National Association of Railroad Passengers is the largest advocacy organization for rail passengers in the United States. In 2018, RPA approached the Mayor's Office seeking support to increase the frequency of rail service provided by Amtrak on the Sunset Limited route. This route provides passenger service from New Orleans to Los Angeles. Currently, the Sunset Limited stops in San Antonio three days a week, or triweekly. Similar train routes in other areas of the nation run daily. There is only one other long distance route operated by Amtrak with triweekly service; the Cardinal which operates in the northeast.

RPA requested the Mayor and City Council approve a resolution requesting Amtrak to increase service to San Antonio on the Sunset Limited route. RPA provided the following items for inclusion in the proposed resolution:

- Sunset Limited is a part of Amtrak's basic national train network connecting Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California.
- The five states have seen a population growth in the counties served by the Sunset Limited route of 22% between the years 2000 and 2016.
- The increasing congestion on the I-10 corridor serving San Antonio needs increased safe, affordable,

and reliable alternatives to automobile and air travel

- Amtrak has announced its plan to handle ticketing for the Texas Central Rail which will connect with the Sunset Limited in Houston.
- A daily stop on the Sunset Limited in San Antonio will enhance connectivity with the existing daily trains such as the Amtrak Texas Eagle service from San Antonio to Chicago and transportation hubs in New Orleans, San Antonio and Los Angeles as well as to the proposed Texas Central Railway line in Dallas.

On September 4, 2018, Mayor Nirenberg provided the RPA's proposed resolution to Transportation Committee Chair, Councilman Rey Saldana, for consideration and recommendation to City Council. On September 17, 2018, the Transportation Committee recommended to bring forth the resolution to City Council.

ISSUE:

This resolution is part of an overall strategy by the Rail Passengers Association (RPA) to create a unified voice to State and Federal delegations to request increased Amtrak frequency along the Sunset Limited from three times a week to daily service. RPA intends to discuss the increased frequency with the other major cities along the Sunset Limited route such as Los Angeles, Phoenix, El Paso, Houston, and New Orleans. With enough State and Federal interest, Amtrak may initiate a feasibility review to evaluate passenger demand and needed infrastructure improvements for the increased service, such as improvements along the railroad system as well as at the San Antonio Train Station. Federal support will be critical for future funding since railroad track improvements will need large amounts of federal funding and grants. This resolution could advance existing and future advocacy for improved service and subsequent funding required by state and/or federal funding.

ALTERNATIVES:

As an alternative, City Council could choose not to submit a resolution to Amtrak. The Rail Passenger Association would continue their advocacy for San Antonio passenger train connectivity and availability without City support.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this resolution. Should there be a need for City Council to approve funding that would leverage significant Federal funding to achieve more service frequency, funding would be identified and appropriated through subsequent City Council action.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends a resolution supporting the Rail Passengers Association's request for Amtrak to increase the frequency of service of the Sunset Limited to daily as soon as practicable.