

# California Rail News

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## U.P. Starlight Delays Hit Press



### TRAIN PERFORMANCE SUDDENLY IMPROVES

Union Pacific's technique for trying to dispose of passenger service finally seems to be wearing thin. The intended victim this time was the *Coast Starlight* instead of the *Sunset Limited* or the *Texas Eagle*, but the old weapon of chronic lateness, may have been used one time too many. The question is whether the U.P. congestion excuse for its bad service makes any sense when applied to the sparsely-trafficked Coast Route.

In June 2006, only 15 percent of *Coast Starlight* trains reached their final destinations less than four hours late. In July 2006, only 12 percent did.

Capitol Corridor and San Joaquin trains have struggled to maintain reliable performance in the past few months, but the *Starlight* statistics were so bad one might conclude that the Union Pacific railroad was purposely delaying the train.

Passengers on the Los Angeles-Seattle train complain of being sidetracked by freights and left waiting for hours on the Union Pacific portion of the run between Los Angeles and Portland.

Technically, the Union Pacific practice of delaying passenger trains to give freights the main is illegal, as it violates 49 USC 24308(c), the federal statute which requires that private railroads give Amtrak trains "preference over freight transportation... except in an emergency" or where the Secretary of Transportation, in response to a railroad's application for relief, has "established the rights of the carrier and Amtrak on reasonable terms."

The problem is that such regulations are only useful when they are taken seriously by both federal agencies and railroads.

Freight train interference and railroad slow orders on the *Starlight* route are responsible for the bulk of delay in recent train performance reports, quantified in total minutes by cause.

Amtrak said it has tried to work with Union Pacific to improve train performance. Specifically, Amtrak has added over three hours of scheduled recovery time to the *Sunset Limited*, and changed its schedule slot to a midday Los Angeles departure.

Amtrak has repeatedly rerouted the *California Zephyr* in the summer to allow Union Pacific to do track work on its Colorado schedule, and allowed the *Coast Starlight* route to be modified earlier this summer for track work. The Union Pacific's response has been to continue to worsen overall long distance train performance.

In July 2006, 97 percent of the 211 Amtrak long distance trains operated primarily on Union Pacific arrived late. Of these, 84 percent arrived more than 2 hours late, 74 percent more than 3 hours late and 66 percent more than 4 hours late.

Responding to a TRAC press conference protesting the *Starlight* performance at the Sacramento Amtrak station, a Union Pacific spokesperson attributed the *Starlight* delays to "increased Union Pacific freight traffic" due to "unprecedented demand."

Coverage of the event was pervasive, (continued on Page Two)

**Coast Starlight or the Shasta Daylight? It's neither. It's both! 12 hour late trains made some passengers angry, but inspired others to make unique trips for photos of spectacular views. See Page 7 for hints.** Photo: Randell Hansen

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