

Travel by Train—Then and Now

A comparison of historic and modern pricing

Until the airline industry was deregulated in the late 1970s travel by common carrier, both rail and air, was much more expensive in comparative terms than it is today. Unless you held a job which required you to travel at company expense or had a family member which was employed in the transportation industry and was eligible for a pass, travel by air or train was likely to be an uncommon event unless you came from a well-to-do background. For most of the millions of young men who were mustered into the armed forces in WWII, it is likely that the government-chartered troop trains were their first introduction to rail travel. The crowded and sometimes makeshift conditions of wartime transport may have given many a negative impression which persisted into the postwar years.

TRIP #1: Chicago-Miami; January 1948

In early 1948 the Chicago-Miami route was served by three streamliners which, combined, offered daily coach service between Chicago and Florida over three differing intermediate routes. One of those was the *City of Miami* operated by Illinois Central between Chicago and Birmingham. Sleeping car service was offered by the daily *Seminole* over the same route; it left Chicago at 10:10 p.m. and arrived Miami at 3:45 p.m. the 3rd day after 2 nights on board. Fares below are for a single traveler in a lower berth or a couple in a private Compartment. (Note: Dining car meals not included)

Class	Rail Fare	Pullman/Seat charge	Tax	Total Fare	Inflation %	Fare in 2013 dollars
First – 1 psgr	\$50.29	\$12.60	\$9.43	\$72.32	866.6%	\$699.06
First – Couple	\$100.58	\$35.45	\$20.40	\$156.43	866.6%	\$1,512.09
Coach	\$32.50	—	\$4.88	\$37.38	866.6%	\$361.33

The route was also served by three Delta Airlines flights; one of which departed Chicago at 9:30 a.m., made intermediate stops in Cincinnati, Knoxville, Atlanta, and Jacksonville; arriving Miami at 6:17 p.m. Eastern time. It was one-class service in a 4-engine 44 seat plane, probably a DC-4 or similar.

Class	Air Fare	Tax	Total Fare	Inflation %	Fare in 2013 dollars
One Class	\$71.60	\$10.74	\$82.34	866.6%	\$795.92

This route has had no direct Amtrak service since 1979, but connecting service is offered via the *Capitol Limited* through Washington D.C. If you depart Chicago at 6:40 p.m. on a Friday, your scheduled arrival in Miami will be on Sunday at 6:05 p.m. via the *Silver Star* or 6:55 p.m. by the *Silver Meteor*. Fares below are for a single traveler in a Roomette or a couple in a Deluxe Bedroom. The bedroom is comparable to the 1948 compartment, while the roomette is comparable to the section but more private. Amtrak sleeping car fares, but not coach fares, include all dining car meals.

Class	Rail Fare	Accommodation Charge	Total Amtrak Fare	Comparison Air Fare
First – 1 psgr	\$154.00	\$529.00	\$683.00	\$419.00
First – Couple	\$308.00	\$987.00	\$1,295.00	\$838.00
Coach	\$154.00	—	\$154.00	\$189.00

Historic rail fares from a January 1948 Illinois Central RR public timetable as posted on Streamliner Schedules (<http://www.streamlinerschedules.com>); historic air fares taken from an April 1948 Official Guide of the Railways. See reverse for information on modern-day price quotations.

TRIP #2: Dallas-Los Angeles, October 1959

While the Dallas-Los Angeles route was never served by a direct train, a through sleeping car and connecting coach service was available via Texas & Pacific to El Paso and Southern Pacific's *Sunset* to L.A.; also by Santa Fe's *California Special* from Dallas to Clovis, N.M., handing over there to the *San Francisco Chief* and then to Santa Fe's *Grand Canyon* at Winslow. If you left Dallas at 8:15 p.m. on a Sunday evening, you could expect to arrive Los Angeles at 12:10 on a Tuesday afternoon. Fares are for a single traveler in a lower berth, a couple in a private bedroom, and do not include dining car meals.

Class	Rail Fare	Pullman/Seat charge	Tax	Total Fare	Inflation %	Fare in 2013 dollars
First – 1 psgr	\$56.50	\$17.70	\$7.42	\$81.62	700.5%	\$653.40
First – Couple	\$113.00	\$39.05	\$15.21	\$167.26	700.5%	\$1,338.98
Coach	\$42.38	\$0.50	\$4.29	\$47.17	700.5%	\$377.61

Air service in 1959 was provided by American Airlines in a pressurized DC-7 which departed Dallas at 5:45 p.m. and arrived Los Angeles 4 hours and 45 minutes later at 8:30 Pacific time.

Class	Air Fare	Tax	Total Fare	Inflation %	Fare in 2013 dollars
First Class	\$81.40	\$8.14	\$89.54	700.5%	\$716.80
Coach Class	\$60.30	\$6.03	\$66.33	700.5%	\$531.00

This route is currently served by Amtrak three days a week each way with a through sleeper and coach which are exchanged from the daily *Texas Eagle* to the triweekly *Sunset Limited* in San Antonio. Leaving Dallas at 11:50 a.m. of a Saturday morning, you will be scheduled to arrive L.A. at 5:35 a.m. Monday morning. Fares are for a single traveler in a Roomette or for a couple in a Deluxe Bedroom. Sleeping Car fares include dining car meals; coach fares do not.

Class	Rail Fare	Accommodation Charge	Total Amtrak Fare	Comparison Air Fare
First – 1 psgr	\$148.00	\$326.00	\$474.00	\$642.00
First – Couple	\$296.00	\$748.00	\$1,044.00	\$1,284.00
Coach	\$118.00	—		\$129.00

Finally, a modern-day fantasy trip by chartered private cars:

The trip begins in Houston, where you board your private cars at 11:00 a.m. on a Friday and find brunch awaiting you. When the *Sunset Limited* arrives from the west your two cars are coupled on to the rear of the train; there is a sleeping car which can accommodate ten guests and a lounge car with observation platform and upstairs Vista-Dome. On your way to New Orleans you enjoy a gourmet dinner prepared by your personal chef and served by your stewards. When the train arrives in New Orleans your cars become your hotel for the weekend; there is breakfast or brunch served in the mornings and cocktails each evening in the dome. (Lunch and dinner on your own in New Orleans; no great hardship!) On Monday morning you awake to a full breakfast as your car is prepared for a 9:00 a.m. departure; lunch is served en route and another gourmet dinner is prepared for you to enjoy upon arrival in Houston. You detrain after dinner at your leisure.

Total including food, beverages, rail car and Amtrak charges: \$20,500.00 for 8 guests, plus gratuities.

Historic rail fares from an October 1959 Santa Fe Railway public timetable as posted on Streamliner Schedules (<http://www.streamlinerschedules.com>); historic air fares from an April 1959 Official Guide of the Railways. Inflation-adjusted 2013 comparative prices calculated by <http://www.usinflationcalculator.com/>. Modern-day rail fares as quoted by <http://www.amtrak.com/home> on 1/21/2014 for travel beginning on 2/21/2014 or as soon thereafter as schedules permit. Modern-day air fares as quoted on 1/21/2014 for travel on 2/21/2014; fares do not include agency, baggage, or other fees. Please note that Amtrak and the airlines use yield management and that all fares are subject to change without notice; there is no guarantee that you can obtain the same or a comparable fare. Private Car charter based upon a quote by Creative Charters (<http://www.phcp.com/CreativeCharters.html>) dated 1/15/2014 and subject to change without notice.