



In 2016, the LA Galaxy traveled more than 38,000 miles to their 17 MLS road games. Taken in context of the wider sports landscape, the figure was stunning. Setting aside that the number was many times larger than the requirements of any soccer league in the world, it dwarfed many *American teams* as well. It was more than all but eight Major League Baseball teams, who are privy to a 162-game season. Three others – Houston, Seattle and Vancouver – barely crested 40,000.

The 2017 SF Deltas laugh – and perhaps cry – at the paucity of the figure.

The San Francisco Deltas are the NASL's newest franchise, a lone figure walking into a burning building. The NASL shuddered at its foundations in 2016, losing five teams to MLS, the USL and closure as well as sole ownership of its Division II status alongside the faster-rising USL. The Deltas are the only fresh face in the league in 2017 (North Carolina FC is essentially just replacing the RailHawks), and they're also the first NASL team planted on the American West Coast in the modern league's history.

This is now the NASL club map.



It takes no molecular physician to see that the Deltas are in for a historic and potentially crippling amount of travel this year. And in fact, pound-for-pound it's probably the single most rigorous regular season travel schedule in sports history (if you can find a worse one, *please contact immediately* and let me know where the bodies are buried).

The Deltas will travel 85,000 miles this season. In a league with a dangerously uncertain future. Sustainability, thy name doth not belong here.

If we're being exact, it's actually 85,302 miles spread across 16 road games. *Sixteen games*. That's just one fewer than what's required of MLS teams, and the Deltas will travel *45,000 more miles* than any of them did last year. The Deltas have to go to Miami *three times* in 2017 and Puerto Rico twice. In fact, it's closest opponent is *Edmonton* (in a *different country*) which has a slightly less grueling schedule, but not by much. And remember, it isn't like this franchise has a solid underpinning. It's literally never operated for a full season before. It is an expansion team in the purest sense of the word.

The NASL is in perilous stead. Rumors of its demise in 2016 were exaggerated, but not by much. Since 2015 it has lost eight teams, seven of which did not have immediate geographic replacements, and witnessed the rise of a competitor league that it has done almost nothing to match in pace and competency. The reason the USL has succeeded where the NASL has failed is largely a matter of infrastructure. The USL built itself on sturdy pilings and a sane, holistic business plan that attracted quality and invested local ownership. It is why MLS hitched its development wagon to the league and why it is about to crest 30 teams in 2018 and will continue expanding after that. Simultaneously, it is why the NASL's club number is currently at eight.

SF Deltas was clearly a well intentioned add in a fresh market for the league, but their frankly unbelievable travel schedule is cost prohibitive and will destroy the club in the long run unless the league adds more regional competition. The amount of money required of a team to travel *85,000 miles in seven months* would be immense for anyone, let alone a first-year club in a faltering league. Here's hoping it isn't too much for the club – and the league – to handle.