Short Lines To Congress: We have the ‘Right Stuff’

Short lines contribute to the U.S. economy, provide an environmentally sustainable freight transportation option, and ensure the livelihood of thousands of Americans and companies.

WASHINGTON, December 5, 2019 – Today Chuck Baker, President of the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRA) shared the short line story with the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee during a hearing entitled “Where’s My Stuff?: Examining the Economic, Environmental, and Societal Impacts of Freight Transportation”. The hearing was jointly hosted by the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials and the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit.

“You have asked me to tell you ‘where’s my stuff’ as it relates to the short line railroad industry. I am happy to report that short line railroads have lots of stuff, it’s the right stuff, and we are here to transport America’s stuff in a safe, efficient, and environmentally friendly manner,” stated Baker in his opening remarks.

Baker went on to illuminate the short line industry’s contributions to the nation’s economy, including:

- **Preserving service and access to markets** over track headed for abandonment under previous owners. “For large areas of the country and particularly for small town and rural America, short line railroad service is the only connection to the national railroad network. For the businesses and
farmers in those areas, our ability to take 25 cars 75 miles to the nearest Class I interchange is just as important as the Class I’s ability to attach that block of traffic to a 100-car train and move it across the country,” said Baker.

- Railroads are an **all-American** proposition. Virtually everything used for infrastructure improvement – the ties, the rail, the ballast, the locomotives and the freight cars – is made in America, so every dollar railroads spend is spent in America.

- Short line railroads **create jobs in rural America**. Short lines and the shippers they serve are a significant source of good paying jobs in rural America.

- Short lines **lower transportation costs** for shippers because one rail car holds the equivalent of three to four truckloads and railroads use fuel more efficiently than trucks. Baker cited a typical example from Oklahoma: the cost of moving a ton of freight 95 miles from Clinton to Enid, Oklahoma is $2.24 per mile on the railroad versus $3.75 per mile for comparable truck service. This level of savings is replicated across the country and is a very meaningful number for the businesses served.

In addition to the right economic stuff, Baker stated that short lines have the “right environmental stuff”, citing the markedly lower environmental impact of short line freight transportation versus other transportation options.

“Railroads are the most fuel-efficient way to move freight over land – three to four times more fuel efficient than trucks. Today, a freight train can move one ton of freight an average of more than 470 miles on one gallon of diesel. The EPA has measured the sources of transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions and rail is a big success story: cars and light trucks account for 60%, heavy trucking is 23%, air travel is 9%, and freight rail is only 2%.” shared Baker. “Further, rail positively impacts highway congestion and the resulting harmful emissions. The short line industry handles over 12 million carloads annually which is the equivalent of taking 40 million truckloads off of the highway.”

Finally, Baker described the important societal benefits of short line railroading. “Rail is the safest option for moving freight by land in America. Using USDOT data and measuring on a comparable ton-mile basis, rail is approximately 3-5 times safer than trucking. Short lines are proud of our safety culture and work
diligently to reduce and eliminate injuries. In 2018, 265 short lines reported zero accidents to the FRA. The average accident rate that year was a near record low of 1.84 per million train miles. We are also proud of the Short Line Safety Institute, which exists to provide voluntary intense safety culture assessments on short lines all over the country as we continually strive for zero accidents, injuries, and fatalities.”

Baker closed his testimony with a call for Congress to enable continued growth for the short line industry by acting on the Short Line Tax Credit (45G) before the end of the year, continuing to fund rail improvement projects through programs like CRISI, BUILD, and INFRA, and provided key policy issues to be mindful of when creating a surface transportation reauthorization bill, such as avoiding changes to truck size and weight limits and avoiding an unnecessary crew size staffing law.

“Short Line railroads have the right stuff, and with your continued support in the areas I have identified, we will provide even more of the stuff that matters - jobs, economic opportunity, environmental sustainability, and business growth, particularly in small town and rural America,” Baker concluded.

Baker’s written testimony can be found here.

# # #

About ASLRA - The American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRA) is a non-profit trade association representing the interests of the nation’s 603 short line and regional railroads and railroad supply company members in legislative and regulatory matters. Short lines operate 47,500 miles of track in 49 states, or approximately 29% of the national railroad network, touching in origination or termination one out of every five cars moving on the national railroad system, serving customers who otherwise would be cut off from the national railroad network. www.aslra.org