Board Members Elected at Eastern Region Meeting

New members were elected to ASLRRA’s Eastern Region Board of Directors during the Association’s annual Eastern Region Meeting held Oct. 7-9 in Columbus, Ohio.

Nathan Fenno, president of the New York, Susquehanna and Western Railway, and Eric Levin, assistant vice president of engineering and mechanical for Conrail, were elected to three-year terms.

ASLRRA thanks outgoing board members Mike Bostwick, executive vice president and chief commercial officer of Springfield Terminal, a subsidiary of Pan Am Railways, and Donna Coleman, vice president of Norfolk and Portsmouth Belt Line Railroad, for their service.

Staggers Act Anniversary is a Reminder of Its Impact on the Railroad Industry

After years of federal regulation that controlled almost all aspects of railroad operation including rates and service practices, by the late 1970s, the rail industry was on the verge of bankruptcy. Intense federal regulation, increased competition from trucks and airlines and worn-out infrastructure had taken their toll on U.S. freight railroads. The passage of the Staggers Act on Oct. 14, 1980, helped bring the industry back to life and aided the formation of the modern-day short line railroad industry.

Congress and members of the Carter administration hoped deregulation would resurrect railroad business, boosting the slumping U.S. economy at the same time.

The Staggers Act gave railroads the ability to set their own rates based on market conditions, and reduced regulatory intervention except when competition was absent. A transcript from a 2015 U.S. House of Representatives hearing on the anniversary of the Staggers Act describes the law’s effects as having “led to more efficient service and lowered costs,” and improved railroads’ overall financial health. This in turn allowed increased investment in infrastructure and technology that has made rail service more reliable and safe.

Passage of the Staggers Act also enabled larger railroads to shed inefficient lines or services, which resulted in the explosive growth of the short line industry. Short line operators took over unproductive branches, saving small railroads from closing and keeping rural economies connected to larger markets.

As the ASLRRA website notes, today’s short line industry operates over 50,000 miles of track, and its 603 railroads employ 20,000 people and haul more than 14 million carloads per year.

This year’s 39th anniversary of the passage of the Staggers Act serves as a reminder of the impact such legislation had not only on the rail industry, which had been subject to a regulatory structure in existence since 1887, but the national economy.
RRB Welcomes New Chief Information Officer

The Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) has named Terryne Murphy its new chief information officer (CIO).

Murphy will head the board’s Bureau of Information Services, supervising its 150-person staff. She will also run the RRB’s information technology program.

Prior to her appointment, Murphy worked at the Department of Commerce, where she had been acting CIO since February 2019.

DOT’s ROUTES Initiative Aims to Address Rural Transportation Needs

A new U.S. Department of Transportation project, called the Rural Opportunities to Use Transportation for Economic Success (ROUTES) Initiative, is being formed to help support rural America’s transportation needs.

U.S. Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao announced the new initiative Oct. 8 at the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) annual meeting.

The goal of the ROUTES Initiative is to address some of the problems facing rural transportation infrastructure, such as the disproportionate number of traffic fatalities that occur in rural areas and
the fact that these areas feature 90 percent of all limited-weight bridges. As the program develops, ASLRRRA will likely be involved in stakeholder meetings.

According to the ROUTES website, the Initiative will pursue three main goals: It will seek input from rural stakeholders regarding the benefits of rural projects and the kind of assistance such projects might need; help stakeholders understand and apply for DOT grant and financing opportunities; and improve “DOT’s data-driven approaches to better assess needs and benefits of rural transportation infrastructure projects.”

To help oversee the initiative, a ROUTES Council will be formed, to be chaired by the Under Secretary for Transportation. All key modal administrations including the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) will be involved in these efforts.

Four Railroad Projects Receive Grants from State of Iowa, Two to Benefit ASLRRRA Members

Iowa’s Transportation Commission recommended awards for four rail-related improvement projects through the Railroad Revolving Loan and Grant (RRLG) Program, which is administered by the state’s Office of Rail Transportation. The focus of the RRLG Program is to support rail projects that will help create jobs, boost economic activity and improve Iowa’s rail transportation system.

Two of the projects involve ASLRRRA members. The Burlington Junction Railway and City of Ottumwa will receive $80,000 in a planning grant to help fund a study into relocating and possibly expanding the railway’s Ottumwa rail port. Additionally, supplier member Trinity Rail will receive a $2,130,973 grant to construct a loop track for railcar cleaning and maintenance. ASLRRRA member Iowa Northern will serve the new Trinity Rail site.

The other two projects include a $32,000 planning grant for the Sioux City 27 Flags study and a $360,000 grant and $1,297,027 loan to Agri Trading to fund expansion.

ASLRRRA New Members

ASLRRRA is pleased to welcome a new member.

Trainyard Tech, LLC, based in Naples, Florida, is a new associate business member. The company offers high-performance process control systems for railyards of all types and sizes. It introduced CLASSMASTER for hump yards in 2004, followed by ROUTEMASTER for flat yards and NX systems. Many thanks to Belt Railway of Chicago for recommending they join ASLRRRA. Our contact is Vice President of Operations Cynthia Ruddy.
ASLRRA Announcements

To further tell the short line story, ASLRRA will profile some of its members who are noteworthy movers and shakers in the railroad industry. These railroads’ savvy decision-making and ingenuity make their business achievements worth sharing.

Georgia Central Railway’s Track Upgrades Make it an Important Player in the State’s Shipping Industry

Infrastructure investments are an important focus in railroad industry current events, as, since the end of 2017, small railroads have been going without a crucial government tax credit that helps offset the cost of infrastructure construction and improvements. The recent achievements of short lines like ASLRRA member Georgia Central Railway show how important infrastructure investments are to the industry, and how making improvements can be key to long-term business expansion.

Georgia Central recently upgraded its entire 211-mile line to handle heavier railcar loadings, matching the capabilities of larger railroads with which the company connects.

Now that Georgia Central’s lines can handle 286,000-pound railcars, it can be more competitive in the shipping market. The weight limits of the 55 bridges on Georgia Central’s line, which were over 20,000 pounds less than the now-upgraded capacity, served as one of the primary limitations on railcar loadings. To make these upgrades, Georgia Central invested $4 million in the past few years, installing 3,200 bridge stringers and 10,000 crossties.

But making bridge upgrades does not comprise the extent of Georgia Central’s planned improvements. With a $4 million Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant from the Federal Railroad Administration, along with the company’s matching investment, Georgia Central plans to increase track speed along its line.

“This is an important milestone in ongoing improvements to the Georgia Central’s ability to serve the growing Savannah market, including industrial development projects that will utilize the Georgia Port Authority’s Garden City container terminal,” said Georgia Central president Andy Chunko in a press release. “The combination of 286k loadings and higher speeds will help us win a greater share of our customers’ freight volumes and make the line even more attractive to new industrial development.”

Those wondering why there is such a fuss about the 45G short line infrastructure investment tax credit need look no further than the efforts of companies like Georgia Central. Taking the initiative to make track improvements positions short lines to capture more of the shipping market, expanding their businesses in a way that is beneficial to the local and national economy.

Early Bird Rates Expire TODAY for ASLRRA’s Southern Region Meeting in November

Today is the last day to save $50 on registration fees and take advantage of discounted hotel rates for this year’s ASLRRA Southern Region Meeting. The meeting takes place Nov. 11-13 in Charlotte, N.C.

In addition to a wide variety of educational sessions covering diverse topics such as disaster preparedness, crisis communications, drug testing issues and cyber security, participants can choose to attend the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Part 225 Accident/Incident Reporting Seminar.

The seminar, presented by FRA Railroad Safety Specialist Mike Wissman, and FRA Chief Inspectors Patrick Corcoran and Greg Drakulic, provides an opportunity for reporting officers, general managers, safety officers and legal representatives to enhance their understanding of FRA Part 225.

Other supplementary education includes the Short Line Safety Institute’s hazardous materials training, which takes place on Nov. 14.
This year’s meeting also offers two social events: An ASLGRA PAC reception and a golf outing at The Golf Club at Ballantyne.

Follow the link for more information or to register.

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**ASLGRA Out and About**

**Oelsner Attends Rail Summit, GIS Committee Meeting in Florida**

ASLGRA’s Assistant Vice President of Data and Technology Fred Oelsner represented the Association at Esri’s 2019 North American Rail Summit and the Association of American Railroads (AAR) GIS Committee meeting held back-to-back at CSX Corporation’s Jacksonville, Fla. headquarters Oct. 7-11.

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**ASLGRA Webinars**

**Crossings: The Necessary Evil We Must Contend With** - Oct. 23, 2019

Attorney Michael Barron of Fletcher and Sippel will focus on the risks and pitfalls of utility crossings and some tools railroads may have to deal with them. Barron will also discuss the current state and best practices of dealing with blocked crossing issues.

**Meeting Positive Train Control Host Requirements, Part 1** - Oct. 30, 2019

This webinar, which was rescheduled from Sept. 26, is the first of a two-part series discussing important requirements PTC tenant railroads must meet to obtain and maintain permission to operate over a host railroad’s PTC territory. This first webinar focuses on interoperability, including industry initiatives to manage interoperable PTC and tenant security measures needed to keep interoperable...
PTC communication pathways protected. C. Ed Tilley of BNSF Railway and Audrey Strathmeyer and Justin Smith of Collins Aerospace will be presenters for the webinar. It is free for all participants.

**Private Grade-Crossing Safety** - Oct. 31, 2019

ASLRA’s Vice President of Safety and Compliance JR Gelnar will teach participants about regulatory requirements regarding private crossings, as well as evaluating the overall safety of a private crossing and how to work with local officials and landowners in mitigating safety concerns.

[Click here](#) for more ASLRA events.

**Industry Events**

[Click here](#) for a listing of industry events.

Views & News is published by American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association. Please contact Amy Krouse, editor, with questions or comments.