Tech Mahindra Joins ASLRRA’s List of PTC Resource Providers

Tech Mahindra is one of ASLRRA’s newest providers of positive train control (PTC) resources for Association members. The company, which provides digital services and solutions to customers, will offer online PTC training for employees of ASLRRA-member railroads.

The training will comprise multiple subject modules, to include interactive training, assessment and evaluation. Each module lasts two hours or less and modules will discuss PTC system interoperability as well as statute-required training for Class II and III railroads needing to be equipped with PTC systems.

Tech Mahindra’s training sessions will be available to members via subscription. These and the other ASLRRA-curated PTC resources were made possible through a $2.5 million Federal Railroad Administration grant meant to help short line railroads meet PTC requirements and deadlines.

Railroad Retirement Board Partners with ASLRRA for Board’s First Remote Education Venture

In its first foray into remote education, the Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) has partnered with ASLRRA to present three webinars, which will be free for both members and non-members.

“We are continuously looking for ways to add value to our members in all aspects of their business. This series addresses a program that is significant to our members and their employees - the unique retirement and disability benefits provided through the RRB,” said Chuck Baker, president of ASLRRA. “The Railroad Retirement program is a major benefit for employees in the railroad industry and a major investment in our great people by the railroad employers, and it’s important for everybody to understand the program. Our online learning program is one of the most popular of our member benefits, and we are looking forward to adding this substantive content to it.”

The first webinar, on Nov. 5, will discuss general eligibility requirements for the program, as well as employee retirement and disability benefits. On Nov. 21, the second webinar will discuss spouse eligibility requirements and benefits and post-retirement work limits. The final webinar, on Dec. 5, will focus on survivor eligibility requirements and other benefit-related information. Jodi Huskey, the RRB’s St. Louis, Mo. district manager, will host each webinar.

FRA Announces Funding Opportunity for Railroad Trespassing Enforcement Grant Program

The Federal Railroad Administration has issued a notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) for the Railroad Trespassing Enforcement Grant Program. The program offers money to pay for law enforcement wages enabling officials to conduct enforcement activities at railroad right-of-way “Hot Spots.”
Railroad “Hot Spots” are areas along the right-of-way where risk of trespassing or collision as a result of trespassing is high. State, county, municipal, local and regional law enforcement agencies are eligible, and the boundaries of the applying agency’s jurisdiction must include at least one mile of FRA-regulated railroad track. The NOFO offers a total of $150,000 for awards, although the FRA noted additional funding may become available.

Preference will be given to law enforcement agencies in states with the highest incidence of trespass-related casualties according to the Rail Accident Incident Reporting System. Those states are California, Texas, Illinois, Florida, New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, New Jersey, North Carolina and Georgia. There are no fund matching or cost-sharing requirements. Applications for the NOFO are due Dec. 23.

ASLRRA and AAR Comment on Proposed Hours-of-Service Rule Changes

ASLRRA and the Association of American Railroads (AAR) submitted joint comments regarding the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration’s notice of proposed rulemaking on hours-of-service (HOS) requirements for commercial motor vehicle (CMV) drivers.

In general, ASLRRA and AAR note that the FMCSA’s regulations regarding CMV drivers’ hours can be a hindrance in emergency situations affecting railroads, where drivers are needed to help restore service or provide other assistance.

However, ASLRRA and AAR do support two particular provisions that can help ease restrictions on CMV drivers in rail emergencies. The first provides drivers two more hours of driving time in adverse weather conditions, and could offer some relief to railroad employees responding to a weather-related incident.

The second supported provision allows a single break, ranging from 30 minutes to three hours, in a period of 14 consecutive on-duty hours during which the driver may drive up to 11 hours. With this change, railroads can have some flexibility when a driver must bring equipment to a location where an unplanned event occurred, but the situation cannot be fixed within the driver’s 14-hour duty period.

Although ASLRRA and AAR see potential in these two provisions of the FMCSA’s proposed HOS changes, the submitted comments note a pending limited exemption request made to FMCSA on behalf of railroads that would grant more freedom to railroad employees responding in emergency situations. Both associations urge the FMCSA to approve their request to provide relief to railroad CMV drivers.
PHMSA, FRA Propose Allowing Shipment of Liquefied Natural Gas by Rail

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), along with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), issued a notice of proposed rulemaking on Oct. 18 regarding the shipment of liquefied natural gas (LNG) by rail.

PHMSA and the FRA are suggesting changes to rules governing the transportation of refrigerated liquid methane, commonly known as LNG, in rail tank cars. The change would allow transportation of LNG by rail in DOT 113 specification tank cars, which are already designed to carry other flammable cryogenic liquids. Currently, LNG can only be shipped by rail in a portable tank after FRA approval.

ASLRRA is monitoring the issue and will comment on behalf of short line railroads.

Senate Finance Committee Chair Aims for Bipartisan Tax Package

An article on the Tax Notes website offers some insight into the future of the short line infrastructure investment tax credit, known as 45G. While the Senate Finance Committee most likely will not consider separate tax extenders legislation this year, committee Chairman Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) indicated he is trying to put together a bipartisan, bicameral tax package to attach to a spending bill.

Grassley is pursuing the tax package as an alternative to a tax extender bill, which did not get off the ground due to disagreements among committee members on bill details. If Grassley can reach an agreement on a tax package through a “four-corners negotiation” with aides to finance committee ranking minority member Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), House Ways and Means Committee Chair Richard E. Neal (D-Mass.), and Ways and Means ranking minority member Kevin Brady (R-Texas), there will be no need for committee action.

Both House and Senate lawmakers want to renew several expired tax extenders like 45G, as well as fix parts of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. Since Congress must pass legislation to fund the government beyond Nov. 21, that bill is the most likely means through which these tax provisions could be approved.

This week the BRACE Act, HR 510, crossed an historic mark of 293 co-sponsors, more than 2/3 of the House. The Senate Bill S203 has 62 co-sponsors. Leadership from both houses continue to work on a path forward.
ASLRRRA Announcements

Elavon Helps ASLRRRA Members with Payment Processing

Each week, ASLRRRA will highlight one of its carefully chosen Member Discount Program providers to help members learn more about the companies offering valuable services at discounted prices.

Elavon is a leading payment processor providing short line railroads and suppliers with innovative payment solutions to enhance their business. Elavon’s simple, cost effective payment processing program is backed by the highest standard of customer service. Plus, ASLRRRA members receive preferred partner pricing.

Advantages of choosing Elavon include: full range of payment types, latest payment technology, data security, year-round customer service access and dedicated account manager and convenient, easily accessible reporting from any web browser.

Visit www.aslrra.org/discounts to learn more and start saving today.

Short Lines in the News: PSR Service Without PSR? Short Line Railroads Can Do It, and They Do It Well

Precision Scheduled Railroading, or PSR, is a hot topic among Class I railroads; it’s a business strategy meant to improve efficiency and minimize costs. But, with their smaller size, Class II and III railroads are able to deliver services exceeding that of their PSR-focused Class I counterparts. That’s the argument of Jim Blaze in his editorial on the Freight Waves website.

How can short lines offer “precision-like” performance with better results than large railroads? According to Blaze, size matters. Additionally, better customer relationships and more focused development deals help Class II and III railroads achieve notable success.

Short lines are more flexible. A smaller network size makes it possible for these railroads to pick up and deliver cars at an extremely reliable rate.

“Actual pull or place can occur at well over 95 percent of the service expectation,” writes Blaze, compared to 60 to 80 percent for Class Is.

Smaller railroads also have less costs associated with manpower, as well as flexibility with work rules, which contributes to their efficiency.

In addition to size, short lines have an advantage when it comes to strong customer relationships based on in-person interactions. While large Class Is often find it difficult to connect with rural customers, those customers are the backbone of short line operations, and short lines can meet personally with business owners to hammer out agreements, discuss service and troubleshoot problems.

Blaze also notes that small railroads focus more on development deals and opportunities along their lines, building business and profit without pulling resources far from home base.
All of these factors have enabled short line and regional railroads to keep localized rail services alive while allowing for an efficient and prosperous business model. So, while Class I turn their attention to PSR, the attributes of smaller railroads are what allow them to deliver superior service without the buzzwords.

**ASLRAA Mourns Passing of Maryland Representative Elijah Cummings**

Baltimore Congressman Elijah Cummings passed away from health complications at age 68. ASLRAA mourns his death and offers condolences to his family, friends, and the constituents he served.

“Rep. Cummings’ career was characterized by doing the right thing, stepping up at the critical moments that defined a generation. He was relentless in his support of Baltimore and for civil rights across the nation. For short line railroads and the ASLRAA, we were blessed to have had him in our corner - he understood the importance of infrastructure investment and rail service to companies in Baltimore, and the importance of the jobs railroads support. He will be missed but never forgotten,” said ASLRAA President Chuck Baker.

Cummings, a Democrat, was chairman of the House Oversight and Reform Committee and a high-ranking member of the House Transportation Committee. He was 23-year House veteran, first elected to Congress in 1996.

**ASLRAA Webinars**

**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**

ASLRAA’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.

**RRB General Eligibility and Employee Benefits - Nov. 5, 2019**

Jodi Huskey, a Railroad Retirement Board district manager, will present the first of three webinars discussing railroad retirement and disabilities benefits. This webinar discusses general eligibility requirements and employee benefits.

[Click here](#) for more ASLRAA 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.