Southern Region Meeting Recap: President’s Award Winners Celebrated, Elections Held

ASLRRRA honored railroads for outstanding safety performance in 2018, presenting President’s Awards at the Association’s annual Southern Region meeting held Nov. 11-13 in Charlotte, N.C.

“The recipients of our President’s Award lead our industry in safety, striving each and every day to value safety above all competing priorities,” said ASLRRRA President Chuck Baker. “Their impressive performance, with either zero reportable accidents, or the best safety rate below the industry average per man-hour of operations, has led the way to record levels of safety performance for the short line industry.”

The Southern Region President’s Award recipients are:
Most Hours of Injury-Free Operation – R.J. Corman Railroad Company/Central Kentucky Lines
Best Safety Rate, greater than 500,000 man-hours – Florida East Coast Railway
Best Safety Rate, 150-250,000 man-hours – R.J. Corman Railroad Company/Central Kentucky Lines
Best Safety Rate, 50-150,000 man-hours – R.J. Corman Railroad Company/Memphis Line
Best Safety Rate, less than 50,000 man-hours – Alabama Warrior Railway

ASLRRRA also held elections for an open spot on the Southern Region Board of Directors. The Association thanks Doug Golden, president of Carolina Coastal Railway, for his service to the board, as he recently completed his term.

Congratulations to Nicole Radford, manager pipelines and wirelines at Florida East Coast Railway, who was elected to serve a two-year term. Radford joins continuing board members Ben Tarbutton, president of Sanderson Railroad Company; Jason Bradt, vice president operations at Genesee & Wyoming Railroad Services, Inc.; Tom Garrett, president of Paducah & Louisville Railway; Laura McNichol, senior vice president government and industry relations at Watco Companies; and Hunter Sims, president of Pickens Railroad Company.

ASLRRRA Members Support Veterans

In recognition of Veteran’s Day on Monday, November 11, ASLRRRA recognizes member companies who prioritize veterans recruitment and ongoing support.

Transitioning from a military career to a civilian one can be a daunting task for America’s veterans, but ASLRRRA and its member railroads are committed to recruiting, hiring and retaining veterans after their active-duty service ends.

The railroad industry has a long tradition of working with and supporting the U.S. military, dating back to the Civil War. The Association of American Railroads estimates roughly 20 to 25 percent of rail employees have some kind of military background.
Each year ASLRRA recognizes a member railroad that best demonstrates an effort to hire and retain veterans through the Association’s Veterans Recruitment Award. This year’s recipient was Buckingham Branch Railroad Company, and company President Steve Powell welcomes the many contributions veterans bring to Buckingham Branch and the short line industry as a whole.

“At BB, we strive to provide employment opportunities to veterans that can allow them to obtain gainful employment outside of the military world,” said Powell. “Military experience can be an asset to a variety of railroad jobs and provide an enhanced level of safety culture.”

Other member railroads have received recognition for their work with the U.S. military. The National Defense Transportation Association (NDTA) recently honored Anacostia Rail Holdings for its work supporting the NDTA’s goals and programs. Anacostia operates Louisville and Indiana Railroad (LIRC), which has done significant work in military logistics. LIRC partners with the Indiana National Guard at Camp Atterbury in Indiana to provide rail service enabling the Army to conduct training missions involving large-scale rail deployments.

LIRC’s work at Camp Atterbury also earned it an ASLRRA Business Development Award (formerly known as the Marketing Awards) in 2018, and the company won two Veterans Recruitment Awards in a row, in 2017 and 2018.

Small railroads can often offer veterans a working environment similar to what they experienced in the military. Moving goods by rail requires specific technical knowledge and skill, and employees must pay close attention to detail and have the discipline to maintain a safe workplace. All of this takes place in a small-business environment, with a more closely knit group of coworkers providing a sense of camaraderie.

“Veterans are valuable employees as they contribute their sense of value and pride as well as strong leadership qualities, reliability and motivation,” said Powell. “They also contribute teamwork, organizational skills, flexibility and the ability to work in all types of changing conditions.”

This Veterans Day, ASLRRA thanks the men and women in the U.S. Armed Forces for their service to our country, and thanks its member railroads for working to support these veterans when they leave the military.
ASLRRA Submits Comments on Trio of STB Demurrage Documents

ASLRRA has submitted comments regarding the Surface Transportation Board’s recently released actions concerning demurrage rules and charges.

The Surface Transportation Board (STB) issued the proposed policy statement and two notices of proposed rulemaking (NRPM) on Oct. 7.

In the proposed policy statement, the STB provides information regarding principles to be considered when judging whether demurrage and accessorial rules and charges are reasonable. ASLRRA’s comments on the statement generally agree with certain points made by the STB, such as the board’s explanation of the purpose of demurrage, but the Association points out that the STB paints these demurrage issues and their solutions with a wide brush, generally overlooking the more nuanced needs and concerns of small railroads.

ASLRRA’s comments regarding the STB’s NPRMs raise similar issues regarding an increase in burdens placed on small railroads. The STB’s NPRM regarding demurrage billing, though focused solely on Class I railroads, could have a significant negative effect on Class II and III railroads if the rule were later applied to them because of the type of data collection and paperwork that would be required. ASLRRA urges the STB to maintain the current proposed exemption for Class II and III railroads from these requirements.

Comments on the STB’s second NPRM also raise concerns for small railroads. The STB’s proposed rule would clarify regulations regarding certain regulation-exempt commodities and boxcar transportation. According to the comments, the STB’s proposed rule “would indeed have significant adverse effects on small entities.” ASLRRA argues that the STB should take no action on the issue at hand, but if the rule is adopted, Class II and III railroads should be exempt because no evidence suggests small railroads’ demurrage practices involving these particular commodities are problematic.

FRA’s New Proposed Rule Requires 40 States, D.C. to Develop and Implement Crossing Action Plans

On Nov. 7, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) issued a notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) to require 40 states and the District of Columbia to develop and implement highway-rail grade crossing action plans.

With this pending new rule for states, short line railroads should stay in contact with the department of transportation in their state to provide awareness of grade crossing safety challenges and contributions in the process of developing a plan to comply with the future rule.

This NPRM responds to a mandate from the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act calling for the issuance of such a rule. Ten states were previously required to develop highway-rail grade crossing action plans, and the new NPRM requires them to update their plans and submit reports explaining how they have implemented their plans. The ten states are Alabama, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Ohio, and Texas.

This proposed rule would revise the existing regulation, 49 CFR 234.11, and the FRA estimates the maximum cost to all states would be approximately $2,000,000. All comments are due January 6, 2020. ASLRRA will monitor the progress of this action for its impact on short lines. Those with questions or concerns can contact ASLRRA’s Jo Strang at jstrang@aslrra.org or JR Gelnar at jrgelnar@aslrra.org.
Notice of Funding Opportunity Issued Through Restoration and Enhancement Grants Program

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has issued a notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) for eligible projects under the Restoration and Enhancement Grants program. Total available funding is approximately $24 million.

Funding is meant for operating assistance grants related to “Initiating, Restoring, or Enhancing Intercity Rail Passenger Transportation.” In this case, operating assistance refers to financial assistance covering applicable operating costs related to areas such as staffing, fuel and electricity, station building utility and maintenance, train yard operation and others.

Grant applications are due Jan. 6, 2020. Just a reminder, ASLRRA offers its members grant-writing assistance through its Member Discount Program. The program’s carefully chosen experts can help member railroads submit grant applications for a variety of funding opportunities at the federal, state and local levels.

ASLRRA Training Videos are available for download
Visit www.aslrra.org for more information!

ASLRRA and Others Continue End-of-the-Year Push for 45G

ASLRRA members, the Legislative Policy Committee, Association staff and our lobbying partners at Chambers, Conlon & Hartwell continue to meet with members of both parties in the House and Senate to explain the intense need to pass the 45G short line infrastructure tax credit.

Our group is particularly focused on reaching out to front line, or swing district, Democrats, conveying the message that the jobs affected by 45G are family-wage jobs that have real impact all across America. We have met with senators on both sides of the aisle over the past few weeks to push them toward a compromise on a tax bill which could carry an extension for 45G for two or three years or potentially even make it permanent.

The bill that currently funds the federal government is set to expire Nov. 21, and we are working to have 45G included on any continuing resolution bill that will happen in November or whatever the next appropriations bill that happens in December will be.

“We are proud of the continued efforts that short line railroads are making in this long and arduous process towards a resolution to the 45G tax credit. This has been a particularly challenging year in the
effort - never before have we gone this long without the credit in place, and investment levels are being affected. Real jobs and real railroads and real service to customers are at stake. We remain hopeful as negotiations are ongoing that we will close out the year with the 45G credit in place,” said ASLRRRA President Chuck Baker.

ASLRRRA Announcements

CAPTRUST Offers ASLRRRA Members Assistance with Retirement Plan Offerings

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.

CAPTRUST Financial Advisors is an independent investment research and fee-based advisory firm specializing in providing retirement plan and investment advisory services to retirement plan fiduciaries, executives, and high-net-worth individuals.

Headquartered in Raleigh, N.C., the firm represents more than $248 billion in client assets with offices in Alabama, California, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Utah.

Visit the Member Discount Program page on our website to learn more.

Railway Age Honors Several ASLRRRA Member Employees as This Year’s Women in Rail Award Winners

Railway Age Magazine has named the winners of its 2019 Women in Rail Awards. Five of this year’s 12 honorees, as well as one of the four women receiving honorable mentions, work at ASLRRRA member companies.

ASLRRRA congratulates Lisa Gatchell, vice president of risk management and associate general counsel at Virgin Trains USA; Lucy Grasso, strategic operations principal at OmniTRAX; Janet Scagnelli, deputy general counsel at Conrail; Joan Smemoe, chief information officer and vice president at Railinc; Kimberly Thompson, vice president of sales and marketing at Genesee & Wyoming Inc.’s G&W Southern Region Railroads; and honorable mention Tabetha Bolton, director labor relations at Conrail.
ASLRA New Members

ASLRA is pleased to welcome two new associate business members.

IAT International, based in Norfolk, Va., conducts business with governments, government-owned companies, and private businesses in all fields of the railroad industry. IAT product lines include new rail that meets AREMA specifications for the North American market, as well as UIC and other specifications. The company offers complete highway crossings systems and parts, Ekoslide switch components and railway infrastructure and supplies rolling stock for reconditioned locomotives, parts and assemblies and new and reconditioned freight cars, flat cars, ballast cars and specialized cars. Our contact is Seth Fleishman, vice president of operations.

Iron Horse Engineering, based in Parkman, Ohio, has specialized in embedded and DF track solutions since 1987. It manufactures track products for rail fixation of all types of paved track supporting vibration mitigation, electrical isolation and track modulus. Products include Ironhorse Railboot, Rail Seal, leveling beams, elastomeric rail grout, rail pads, tie pads and insulators of various types and materials. Our contact is Steve Geissinger, technical sales engineer.

ASLRA Out and About

Assistant Vice President Oelsner Attends Research Forum, Visits Association Member in Washington State

ASLRA’s Assistant Vice President of Data and Technology Fred Oelsner attended Meteorcomm’s Annual Railway Communications Technology Research Forum Nov. 5-6 in Washington state.

Meteorcomm, which was founded in 1975, is a wireless communications technology company that has been developing wireless communications applications for the rail industry since the early 2000s. Its
applications include HyRail monitoring, switch point monitoring and positive train control (PTC) communications.

Oelsner also took time to visit ASLRRRA member Tacoma Rail, which serves 65 customers on 136 miles of track.

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**ASLRRRA Webinars**

**ASLRRRA’s Upcoming Webinars**

**Ops Testing with Employee Performance Tracking for Compliance** – Nov. 14, 2019

This webinar, presented by CloudMoyo’s Senior Railroad Consultant and Program Manager Ashok Madhavan, will cover operations testing with performance tracking and employee accountability for safety compliance. Madhavan will share tips to build a robust program, track employee performance through accountability tools, and help labor relations to improve safety.

**Sales & Use Tax: Supreme Court Rulings Effect on Short Lines** – Nov. 20, 2019

Sales and use tax laws are complicated. Michael Fralix, CPA at Bowers & Company, will review the sales tax exposure that the majority of short line railroads will face, and review what alternatives they have to ensure compliance.

**RRB Spouse Benefits and Working After Retirement** – Nov. 21, 2019

Jodi Huskey, a Railroad Retirement Board district manager, will discuss railroad retirement eligibility requirements for spouses and divorced spouses and review work limits after retirement in the second of three Railroad Retirement Board webinars. This webinar is free for all ASLRRRA members and non-members.

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

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**Industry Events**

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

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