ASLRRA Mourns Passing of Rail Advocate Doyle Corman

Former Pennsylvania state senator and long-time railroad advocate J. Doyle Corman, Jr. died Dec. 8. He was 87.

Corman served as the 34th District state senator from 1977 to 1998, and was a member of the transportation committee for 13 years. Following his retirement from the senate, Corman worked for ASLRRA member R.J. Corman Railroad Group, most recently in the position of manager, government affairs.

At the railroad group, Corman was a lobbyist and consultant who worked tirelessly to further the interests of the company and the entire railroad industry. He was an active supporter of ASLRRA’s efforts in Washington, D.C., and participated in Railroad Day on Capitol Hill almost every year. Corman recently received a lifetime achievement award at a Pennsylvania rail conference.

In a statement, former Governor Tom Ridge lauded Corman for showing “particular leadership in helping to advance critical transportation legislation that is a hallmark of his distinguished legislative career.”

Corman’s son, Jake Corman, followed in his father’s political footsteps and is the current state senate majority leader.

ASLRRA President Tells House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee About Rail’s Impact

On Dec. 5, ASLRRA President Chuck Baker testified about the importance of freight transportation in a hearing before the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, which was hosted by the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials and the Subcommittee on Highways and Transit.

The Committee hearing was titled “Where’s My Stuff?: Examining the Economic, Environmental, and Societal Impacts of Freight Transportation.” When discussing freight rail’s effect on the American economy, Baker pointed out that short lines enable rural towns to connect to larger markets. Railroads also support American industry by relying on American-made products, while also creating jobs and lowering shippers’ transportation costs.

Regarding freight rail’s environmental impact, Baker talked about fuel efficiency and the ability of trains to move large amounts of goods while producing significantly less harmful emissions than other transportation modes. Additionally, he pointed out that trains take shipments off roads, easing wear and tear on highways and reducing congestion.
On society, Baker told lawmakers that, due to short lines’ efforts, rail is the “safest option for moving freight by land in America” and is “approximately 3-5 times safer than trucking.”

Rounding out his testimony, Baker called on legislators to consider moves that would help the short line industry continue to grow. He highlighted extension of the 45G short line infrastructure tax credit as the “number one legislative priority.” He also expressed support for grant programs like CRISI, INFRA and BUILD, offering specific suggestions for improving the programs and the grant approval process.

Baker also cautioned against measures allowing an increase in truck size and weight and mandating train crew sizes.

“Short line railroads have the right stuff,” concluded Baker, “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.”

**ASLRRA Releases Safety Instructions Based on National Transportation Safety Board Report**

ASLRRA issued train emergency brake communication safety instructions to its members based on a safety recommendation report from the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB).

The NTSB’s report, released on Sept. 16, stemmed from an investigation into a fatal train accident in which a Union Pacific (UP) freight train collided with a stationary UP freight train after problems with the air brake system prevented the train from stopping. The engineer and conductor of the striking train died in the accident, which also derailed three locomotives and 57 railcars of the striking train and nine railcars of the stationary train.

ASLRRA calls on its members to take the following steps: (1) Inspect the end-of-railcar air hose configurations to ensure the hose configurations match the intended design and (2) review and revise their air brake and train handling instructions for grade operations and two-way end-of-train device instructions to include monitoring locomotive air flow meters; checking the status of communication between the head-of-train and end-of-train devices before cresting a grade; and knowing the actions to take if the air pressure from the rear of the train does not respond to an air brake application.

Please contact ASLRRA’s Senior Vice President, Safety and Regulatory Policy Jo Strang with any questions.
FHWA Releases Updated Rail Crossing Handbook

The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) issued the third edition of the “Highway-Rail Crossing Handbook,” which explains current practices and requirements for engineering treatments for highway-rail grade crossings.

According to the FHWA, the purpose of the handbook is to provide readers with information consistent with the 2009 Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways (MUTCD) as well as other guidance recently developed by subject-matter experts.

This 2019 version features significant changes, including an effort to reorganize its contents. The handbook has not been updated since 2007.

“This handbook is one more tool in the toolbox to help enhance safety at highway-rail grade crossings,” said Federal Highway Administrator Nicole R. Nason in a press release. “It is part of our ongoing efforts, in partnership with the Federal Railroad Administration and state and local practitioners, to help ensure rail and road users get to their destination safely.”

Release of the updated handbook aligns with a recent announcement by Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao discussing U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) plans to advance highway-rail grade crossing safety.

Other events further align with the DOT’s efforts to improve crossing safety, including a grade-crossing safety summit hosted by the Federal Railroad Administration in August, and a notice of proposed rulemaking that would require all 50 states and the District of Columbia to create or update highway-rail grade crossing action plans. This was also the fourth year the DOT has conducted a campaign focused on encouraging safety at railroad crossings.

Railroad Retirement Board Q&A Focuses on Working After Retirement

The Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) released the December installment of its question and answer series. This month’s discussion explains laws and rules concerning benefit payments to those who work after retirement.

The RRB cautions that it is largely the responsibility of annuitants to report post-retirement work and earnings, and those who do not may have the board take steps to recover overpayment or issue fines. In some cases, an annuitant’s actions could be considered fraud and therefore subject to criminal and civil penalties.

The Q&A outlines basic railroad retirement work restrictions and earnings limitations, exempt earnings amounts, potential earnings deductions, disability annuities and self-employment, among other topics. Follow the link above to learn more.

Department of Transportation Issues Final Rule on Departmental Rulemaking Process

On Dec. 5, U.S. Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao announced a final “rule on rules,” which codifies reforms to the DOT’s rulemaking, guidance and enforcement practices.

The aim of the final rule is to increase transparency, afford the opportunity for more public participation and strengthen the overall quality and fairness of the DOT’s administrative actions.

According to a DOT press release, the main parts of the rule include an incorporation of regulatory reform policies on regulatory budgeting, a “2-for-1” plan that requires the elimination of two regulations for every new regulation adopted, and an explanation of the Regulatory Reform Task Force.
Ultimately, the DOT’s actions do not impose legal obligations and cannot be used as a basis for enforcement.

Representatives Advocate for 45G Through Letters to Leadership

As congressional leaders work on a final legislative package to fund the government beyond the current Dec. 20 deadline, considerations are being made regarding possible additions to the bill, including tax provisions like the 45G short line infrastructure tax credit.

Advocating action on various issues, including 45G, Minnesota representative Angie Craig and Oklahoma representatives Kendra Horn and Kevin Hern sent letters to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy with requests for consideration.

Craig’s letter calls for the 45G tax credit to be retroactively applied from Jan. 1, 2018, when it expired, and extended through Dec. 31, 2020. The joint letter from Horn and Hern lists the House bill, H.R. 510 or the BRACE Act, among other tax bills that the full House of Representatives should consider before the end of the 2019 session, noting its strong bipartisan support, with 295 co-sponsors out of 435 representatives, a number comprising 151 Democrats and 144 Republicans.

ASLRRRA New Members

ASLRRRA is delighted to welcome three new associate business members this week.

Calder Design & Manufacturing Co., based in Houston, Texas, supplies BTR and U-Tube wheelsets, EMD 61, 62 and 70 tooth gear with GG bearing and class F bearing, as well as GE 74 and 83 tooth gear. Our primary contact is company executive Samuel Silva. Please look for them in Booth #1223 at our annual 2020 convention in Grapevine, Texas.
Pacific Western Bank is a commercial bank with over $26 billion in assets and 76 branches primarily located in California, with one in Denver and another in Durham, N.C. Their National Lending Group provides asset-based, equipment, real estate loans and treasury management services to established middle-market businesses on a national basis as well as community and venture banking services. Our primary contact is Senior Vice President, Originations, Columbus Johnson.

Rail Safety Consulting, a Pittsford, N.Y.-based division of TUV Rheinland Mobility, is dedicated to the safe operation of train control and related systems such as PTC and CBTC. It is experienced in meeting FRA regulations as well as AREMA, IEEE, and CENELEC standards for signal and train control equipment. RSC also provides documentation and training services along with RAM analysis and compliance assessment. Our primary contact is Vice President Jeffrey Twombly. Many thanks to our friends at Alaska Railroad for recommending they join.

ASLRAA Announcements

Donate to the Short Line Education Fund Before the Year’s End to be Eligible for a Tax Deduction for 2019

ASLRA’s Short Line Education Fund supports a number of programs bringing educational opportunities to those in the short line industry, and it is not too late to make a donation to help advance the Association’s initiatives.

The fund is a 501c3 nonprofit organization. Donations can be made by individuals or corporations, and all contributions are tax deductible, so donations made before the end of 2019 can be claimed on this year’s tax returns.

Scholarships awarded by the education fund help railroad employees attend industry events, like ASLRA’s annual Connections Convention, and access educational resources. The education fund also develops and implements other programming, including a Leadership Development Training course created by ASLRA and the Short Line Safety Institute and a new General Code of Operating Rules.
ASLRRA Out and About

Gelnar Represents ASLRRA at DHS Workshop, AAR Security Committee Meeting

ASLRRA’s Vice President of Safety and Compliance JR Gelnar attended two meetings recently on behalf of the Association.

On Dec. 3, Gelnar participated in a Transportation Systems Sector Threat Workshop sponsored by the Department of Homeland Security through its Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and the Office of Intelligence and Analysis. The workshop, which took place in Washington, D.C., allowed freight and passenger railroads to present and discuss processes for risk and threat evaluations.

The next day, Gelnar represented ASLRRA at the Association of American Railroads’ Security Committee meeting at AAR offices also in D.C. The committee received briefings from multiple federal agencies and discussed 2020 committee priorities.

ASLRRA Webinars

Upcoming Webinars

FRA Regulatory & Program Requirements for Short Lines, Part 2 - Jan. 8, 2020

In part two of this two-part series, ASLRRA Vice President of Safety and Compliance JR Gelnar will review the program and training requirements of 18 FRA regulations, providing a simple description and overview of the regulation and discussing which regulations require programs and training.

Use ASLRRA’s On-Demand Webinar Page to Access Three-Part RRB Series

The recent partnership between ASLRRA and the Railroad Retirement Board produced three webinars meant to help participants understand the Railroad Retirement Act, Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act and related employee benefits. Those who missed one or more of the webinars can still access a recorded version through ASLRRA’s On-Demand Webinars.

The series discussed topics like general program eligibility, working after retirement and benefits for employees, spouses and survivors. These webinars are free for all short line railroad employees. Follow the link above to go to ASLRRA’s webinar page and find out more.
Industry Events

ASLRRRA Member Railroad Cultivates Relationship with Suppliers Through First-Ever Awards Dinner

ASLRRRA member The Belt Railway Company of Chicago (BRC) held its first Supplier Appreciation Dinner on Nov. 18. The focus was to honor those business partners who demonstrated performance excellence and whose contributions were key to BRC’s overall success in 2019.

“The engagement from our suppliers throughout the past year was truly exceptional and promoted a unified effort in what we are trying to accomplish,” said BRC Terminal Engineer Alex Kurec. “Formal recognition of our appreciation really helps drive that message home to our suppliers.”

The BRC recognized seven companies for their contributions. They were: R.J. Corman, Vancer, Wheelworx North, Alliance Wheel Services, U.S. Gas, Ontario Trap Rock and LJ & Associates.

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.