ASLRRA Hosts “Lunch and Learn” for Tax Aides

On March 15 ASLRRA and Natural Gas Vehicles for America hosted a “lunch and learn” event for congressional tax aides to discuss the impact of expired tax extenders legislation on businesses and taxpayers.

Tax extenders being discussed included the 45G tax credit, which expired at the end of 2017, and the Alternative Fuel Tax Credit. The 45G credit allowed short line railroads to invest more heavily in infrastructure rehabilitation and improvements, while the fuel credit offered $0.50 per gasoline gallon equivalent of certain transportation fuels.

“The right tax policy can be enormously beneficial to the American economy by incentivizing the capital investment businesses need to grow, innovate and create jobs,” said ASLRRA President Chuck Baker. “Those benefits are significantly reduced when tax policy starts and stops in a temporary short-term fashion. Forward planning is impossible and expensive multi-year projects are difficult to undertake.”

Batory Declares Emergency Event Due to Extreme Flooding in Midwest

Federal Railroad Administrator Ronald L. Batory has activated the Emergency Relief Docket (FRA-2019-0001) as of March 19 and put emergency relief provisions of 49 CFR § 211.45 into effect due to extreme flooding currently occurring throughout the Midwest United States. The flooding constitutes an emergency event as related to railroad operations.

In making this determination, the administrator notes that the National Weather Service has issued flood warnings for areas throughout the Midwest and documented historic flooding throughout the region with rivers rising to historic levels in over 40 locations, causing power outages and breached dams and levees. The large amounts of snow and ice resulting from the region’s recent winter weather have melted and swelled rivers, creeks and other inland bodies of water throughout the region.

ASLRRA Seeking Proposals from Member Companies Providing Environmental Assessments and Response Plan Preparation Services

On Feb. 28, PHMSA issued a final rule regarding requirements for Comprehensive Oil Spill Response Plans (COSRP) with an effective date of Aug. 27. This rule will require any railroad transporting loaded cars of Class 3 flammable or combustible liquids with 10% or more oil in concentration by weight in 20 or more cars in a continuous block or 35 or more cars in a train consist to develop and submit a response plan to PHMSA.

In an effort to support railroads impacted by COSRP requirements, ASLRRA is seeking input from supplier members who have expertise in environmental assessments and response plan
ASLRRA Submits Written Statement Regarding Rail and Climate Change

ASLRRA submitted a written statement to the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee for its hearing titled “Examining How Federal Infrastructure Policy Could Help Mitigate and Adapt to Climate Change,” which was held Feb. 26.

In the statement, ASLRRA pointed out the positive impact rail has on both infrastructure and the environment, since using rail not only reduces wear and tear on roadways but significantly lessens the amount of fuel used to transport freight.

The Association encouraged Congress to take steps to help the rail industry and facilitate shippers’ use of rail. These steps include supporting the 45G tax credit and opposing any legislation increasing truck size or length.

U.S. DOT Secretary Chao Announces Creation of New Transportation Council

In her remarks at the South by Southwest (SXSW) conference in Austin, Texas, U.S. Secretary of Transportation Elaine Chao announced the creation of the Non-Traditional and Emerging Transportation Technology (NETT) Council at the U.S. Department of Transportation.

According to a press release, the council will be an “internal deliberative body” at the U.S. DOT that will identify and resolve issues impeding the deployment of new technology, including tunneling, hyperloop and autonomous vehicles.

The creation of the council offers a way for emerging technologies to discuss plans and proposals that might not fit into the DOT’s existing regulatory structure. Currently, the DOT has 11 administrations, with each presiding over certain environmental and regulatory approvals.

“New technologies increasingly straddle more than one mode of transportation, so I’ve signed an order creating a new internal Department council to better coordinate the review of innovation that have multi-modal applications,” said Secretary Chao.

New AASHTO and FHWA Joint Webinar to Discuss Flagging
On March 21 the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) will host a webinar on railroad flagging.

Flagging is a part of construction projects taking place on or near railroad sites. The webinar, which is part of AASHTO and FHWA’s partnership on the second Strategic Highway Research Program (SHRP2) product Railroad Mitigation Strategies (R16), will provide an overview from BNSF on its flagging practices, as well as how the Texas DOT uses notice letters instead of flagging agreements with some railroads.

Registration is free, but required, as participation is limited to 150 people. Click here to register.

State-Specific Fly-ins Target Virginia Representatives

Several representatives from ASLRA member companies participated in a state-specific fly-in March 14, meeting with 10 of 11 Virginia representatives in their offices on Capitol Hill to discuss the importance of the 45G tax credit.

Beryl Beagle and Darlene Metz of supplier member Stella-Jones, Donna Coleman and Cannon Moss of the Norfolk & Portsmouth Belt Line Railroad, Lois Frank and Steve Powell of the Buckingham Branch Railroad and Kim Smith of Genesee & Wyoming talked about how the credit allows their companies to invest in their railroads, for example enabling Buckingham Branch Railroad to buy railroad ties from companies like Stella-Jones.

Participants urged their representatives to sign on as co-sponsors of H.R. 510, a bill that would make the 45G tax credit permanent. At the time of the meeting none of Virginia’s representatives were co-sponsors, but since then at least one, Representative Gerry Connolly, has become a co-sponsor. As of today, there are 140 co-sponsors in the House of Representatives for H.R. 510 and 27 for the Senate’s version of the bill, S.203.

ASLRA’s lobbying team at Chambers, Conlon & Hartwell is currently working on fly-ins for the New England region and Florida. Those with questions or who are interested in participating in this kind of political outreach can contact Will Resch of CCH at Will.resch@cch-llc.com.
ASLRRA’s CONNECTIONS Convention Features Targeted Education Sessions

ASLRRA wants to make sure its annual CONNECTIONS Convention puts education at the forefront, which is why it puts together educational sessions geared toward specific industry professionals.

This year, for attendees in the engineering and maintenance-of-way and mechanical fields, sessions include discussions on critical bridge elements inspection, GIS enhancement, quality assurance specification and rail car maintenance and repair.

ASLRRA’s convention is April 6-9 in Orlando, Fla. The convention website features a full list of educational tracks for engineering and maintenance of way and mechanical professionals, as well as tracks for other fields. Follow this link to learn more or to register.

Help Others in the Railroad Community by Supporting ASLRRA’s Silent Auction

ASLRRA’s silent auction at its annual CONNECTIONS Convention raises money for the Association’s Short Line Education Fund. One way the fund benefits members of the railroad community is by providing scholarships for member employees to attend the convention. So, by supporting the silent auction and the education fund, you are helping more people enrich their knowledge of the railroad industry and bring that information back to their companies.

The Education Fund is a 501c3 nonprofit organization and donations from individuals and corporations are tax deductible. There are no limitations on donations. Some of the most popular items at the silent auction include industry products and services. Other desirable auction entries are video gaming consoles, digital cameras and recorders; the latest technology and gadgets; vacation getaways; jewelry and luxury items; and, of course, anything train related.

Cash donations are always welcome and can be used to sponsor consignment items. Complete the 2019 Donation Form to make a donation, or contact Sabrina Waiss with any questions. Thank you for your support!

Make Your Voice Heard at Railroad Day on Capitol Hill – Register Now!

Register today for the annual Railroad Day on Capitol Hill on May 8. Railroad Day offers participants the chance to speak with legislators in Washington, D.C. about issues that matter most to the railroad industry.

By speaking to lawmakers in person, participants show the real people whose livelihoods are affected by the laws being passed in Congress. That kind of exposure is powerful, and the sheer number of railroad representatives who get involved makes this day one of the most effective ways to convey the importance of rail.

Railroad Day begins with check-in, followed by appointments at the capitol and an evening reception at Union Station. ASLRA will offer two webinars prior to Railroad Day to help participants prepare for their appointments on Capitol Hill.
**ASLRAA Events**

**Webinars**

[**Tax Reform Traps and Issues**](#) - 5/15/2019

This webinar will discuss some of the tax traps and pitfalls related to the 2017 Tax Reform Act and explain how to deal with them.

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

**Industry Events**

**Michigan Tech’s Rail Transportation Program to Host Annual Summer Youth Program**

Michigan Tech is holding its tenth annual [Rail and Intermodal Transportation Summer Youth Program](#) July 7-13 at its Houghton, Mich. campus.

The program provides high school students the opportunity to learn about the railroad and intermodal transportation industries. Students will have hands-on classroom lessons and on-site field visits. The application deadline is May 1, and scholarships are available. View the link above for more information or to apply.

**AAR to Hold Rail Mechanical Operations Seminar May 14 - 16**

The Association of American Railroads is holding its 37th annual North American Rail Mechanical Operations Seminar May 14-16 at the Sheraton Dallas Hotel in Dallas.

The seminar is a part of AAR’s effort to keep car owners, shippers, car shop operators and railroad mechanical personnel abreast of information on mechanical inspections and AAR interchange rules. Click [here](#) for more information or to register.
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.