Chao Announces BUILD Grant Funding Opportunity

On April 22 Secretary of Transportation Elaine L. Chao announced a Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for $900 million in grant funding through the Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) Transportation Discretionary Grants program. BUILD grants are meant to fund investments in surface transportation infrastructure and can be used on projects affecting roads, bridges, transit, rail, ports or intermodal transportation. Up to 50 percent of this year’s grant funding will go to rural projects, particularly those that emphasize better access to “reliable, safe and affordable transportation” for rural communities.

Grant applications are due July 15. In order to help those interested in applying for BUILD grants, DOT is holding a series of five webinars discussing various aspects of the application process. The webinars will be held April 30 and May 2, 7, 9 and 14. All webinars will be recorded and made available on the DOT website.

To help Association members applying for funding like BUILD grants, ASLRRA has teamed up with experts to offer grant-writing services through its member discount program.

NHTSA and FRA Launch Campaign to Urge Caution at Railroad Crossings

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and Federal Railroad Administration have launched a month-long safety campaign titled “Stop. Trains Can’t.” to encourage the public to exercise caution at highway-rail grade crossings.

The campaign is part of a three-year effort to drive down recent increases in railroad crossing fatalities. In 2018 270 people were killed at railroad crossings, with 99 fatalities occurring when a driver tried to bypass lowered crossing gate arms. Those 99 deaths represent a 10-year high.

“So many fatalities at highway-railway crossings are preventable, and this campaign is key to raising public awareness and saving lives,” said Secretary of Transportation Elaine L. Chao in a press release.

Advertising will run from April 16 to May 12 and include videos on digital and social platforms, radio advertisements and social media messaging. While the program is meant for a national audience, certain ads will be targeted to high-incident communities in certain states.

ASLRRA will be supporting this messaging during the period.
PHMSA Issues Notice of Emergency Waiver Order to Railroad Carriers

On April 23, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration issued a notice of emergency waiver order to railroad carriers waiving certain expedited movement requirements when conducting operations within the Nebraska severe winter storm, straight-line winds and flooding disaster area.

The order was issued to provide the regulatory relief deemed in the public interest and necessary to ensuring safe transportation of hazardous materials by railroads conducting operations within the disaster area.

The waiver order is effective immediately and will remain in effect for 30 days from its issue date.

DOT’s Build America Bureau Gets New Executive Director

Morteza Farajian is the new executive director of the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Build America Bureau, and will officially take the helm next week.

Farajian was previously a top official at the Virginia Department of Transportation, serving as acting deputy secretary of transportation and director of the Office of Transportation Public-Private Partnerships.

The Build America Bureau helps drive U.S. transportation infrastructure development projects, which includes providing assistance with project development and making it easier to access and understand credit and grant programs.
Number of Co-Sponsors of H.R. 510 Tops 160

Since the beginning of the month, H.R. 510, the House bill to make the railroad track maintenance tax credit permanent, has added a dozen new co-sponsors, bringing the total to 167 of the 218 votes needed to pass the legislation.

Progress is also being made in the Senate, with that version of the bill, S.203, reaching 30 co-sponsors.

ASLRA, along with its lobbying firm Chambers, Conlon and Hartwell, are continuing to reach out to representatives to communicate the importance of the tax credit and garner support for the bill. Freshman members of Congress are one area of focus, since they are generally not as familiar with the impact of the tax credit on the short line industry.

As always, please consider inviting your representative to your railroad. If your representative is new to Congress take some time to tell him or her about your operations. Members of Congress love hearing from the businesses they represent and many would appreciate an opportunity to learn more by visiting your railroad. Feel free to reach out to your team in DC if you’re interested in hosting an event. We are here to help. Contact Will Resch of Chambers, Conlon and Hartwell at Will.resch@cch-llc.com.

Kentucky Congressman Visits Stella-Jones Facility

Congressman James Comer (R-Ky.) toured the Fulton, Ky. rail tie facility of ASLRA supplier member Stella-Jones on April 18.

In addition to the tour, Comer and others participated in a policy discussion, which focused in part on the push to pass the 45G tax credit. Comer is a co-sponsor of H.R. 510, the BRACE Act of 2019, which would permanently extend the railroad track maintenance tax credit.

The 70 employees at Stella-Jones’s Fulton facility process over one million rail ties every year, a portion of the millions of pressure-treated wooden crossties Stella-Jones supplies to railroads throughout North America. The 45G tax credit benefits suppliers like Stella-Jones, whose products are integral to the infrastructure projects made possible through such funding.

“The short line railroad tax credit allows short lines to invest more of their own capital in rail improvements and maintenance to provide ever-safer and more robust service capabilities for their customers,” said ASLRA President Chuck Baker in a press release. “ASLRA thanks Representative Comer for his support of Stella-Jones and other key businesses in Kentucky that support the rail industry and the entire national economy.”

More Details on Railroad Day 2019

This year’s Railroad Day on Capitol Hill on May 8 promises to connect a variety of railroad stakeholders with the legislators whose decisions have a direct impact on the rail industry. Registration is still open for those who want to help convey a unified industry message to Congress.

The day starts with breakfast and check-in, followed by appointments from 9:00 am to 4:30 pm and an evening reception at Union Station. ASLRA hotel room blocks are sold out, but those wishing to stay overnight can still find rooms in nearby hotels throughout the city.

Registrants MUST sign up for a webinar to obtain the details of the day - logistics will be different than in past years!
ASLRRA Announcements

Mark Your Calendars for Railroad Day 2020, 2021

ASLRRA has confirmed March 4, 2020 and March 10, 2021 as future event dates.

This year’s Railroad Day on Capitol Hill on May 8 promises to connect a variety of railroad stakeholders with the legislators whose decisions have a direct impact on the rail industry. Registration is still open!

New Members

ASLRRA is pleased to welcome the following member:

Succession Planning for Railroads Investing in the Next Generation or SPRING LLC, based in Fairfax, Virginia, provides a solution that combats a transitioning workforce and initiates succession planning for a sustainable future in the rail industry. SPRING focuses on recruiting the next generation of railroaders, from veterans to the graduate network of 32+ schools that are already supporting their mission. Our contact is President and Founder Michele L. Malski
ASLRRRA 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 ASLRRRA events.

Industry Events

Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Safety Conference Returns in 2019

After a four-year lull, the National Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Safety Conference has been revived and will take place August 19-22 in Pittsburgh, Pa.

This year’s event is hosted by the Federal Railroad Administration, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, Texas A&M Transportation Institute, SEDA-COG Joint Rail Authority, North Shore Railroad Company, Railway System Suppliers, Diamondback Signal, Union Pacific Railroad and BNSF Railway.

The Texas A&M Transportation Institute hosted the last safety conference in 2015.

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.