ASLRRA President Speaks at TRB Meeting

At the annual Transportation Research Board (TRB) meeting, held Jan. 12-16 in Washington, D.C., ASLRRA President Chuck Baker participated in a discussion panel titled “The Future of North American Freight Rail Transportation.”

Panelists at Baker’s Jan. 13 session offered a perspective of freight rail’s future in relation to new technologies and operating practices. Baker’s remarks focused on the short line industry, highlighting the recent extension of the 45G short line tax credit and calling for the improvement of data collection and analysis to help provide more thorough shipping information to customers. Baker also stressed the need for short lines to work more closely with suppliers and Class I railroads to better understand and utilize important information those companies may generate.

ASLRRA’s Crystal Gitchell, Amy Krouse, Fred Oelsner, and Jo Strang also attended the TRB meeting, each attending a variety of breakout sessions relevant to the short line rail industry.

ASLRRA Hires New General Counsel Sarah Yurasko

ASLRRA welcomes Sarah Yurasko, the Association’s new general counsel. She takes over for Keith Borman, who has retired after 15 years at ASLRRA.

Yurasko brings years of experience representing railroad interests for a variety of entities. She has worked at the Federal Railroad Administration, Amtrak, and was most recently assistant general counsel at the Association of American Railroads (AAR). While at AAR, Yurasko frequently interacted with staff members at ASLRRA, particularly its safety and regulatory division.

Additionally, Yurasko has served on the Board of Directors for the League of Railway Women since 2017, and is currently the group’s vice president.

“We are thrilled to bring Sarah aboard and are very confident that she will bring the breadth and the depth of her industry expertise and her passion for advocacy to the table in support of our members,” said ASLRRA President Chuck Baker in a press release. “I have had the good fortune of working with her on many issues over the last decade and have witnessed first-hand her attention to detail, constant professionalism, calm demeanor, and wise counsel.”

Submit Nominations for ASLRRA’s Annual Business, Safety and Veterans Awards

Nominations are now being accepted for ASLRRA’s annual Business Development Awards, Safety Person and Safety Professional of the Year Awards, and Veterans Engagement Award. Nominations for business and safety awards are due Feb. 14, while veterans award entries are due Feb. 28. Winners will be recognized during this year’s Connections Convention, held May 2-5 at the Gaylord Texan in Grapevine, Texas.
Business Development Award

ASLRRA’s Business Development Award recognizes member railroads that have designed and enacted the most innovative and successful business-building initiatives in the small railroad industry. Previous winners have been honored for growing business with current customers, creating new opportunities in the midst of a customer’s business challenge and recognizing and adjusting to industry shifts to create replacement opportunities.

Click here for more information about the business development award, including criteria and how to nominate a railroad. Please contact Amy Krouse at akrouse@aslrra.org with any questions.

Safety Person and Safety Professional of the Year Awards

The Safety Person of the Year Award goes to a non-management employee of a member railroad who works with management on effective safety programs, exhibits a high degree of safety awareness and contributes off-duty time to activities promoting safety awareness in the community. Nominees do not need to have “safety” in their title to meet this criteria. Click here for Safety Person of the Year nomination criteria or here for a nomination form.

The Safety Professional of the Year Award is open to any railroad management employee of an ASLRRA member railroad who is responsible for safety programs, training and the overall management of safe behavior and actions on his or her railroad(s). Click here for Safety Professional of the Year nomination criteria or here for a nomination form.

Please contact Crystal Gitchell at cgitchell@aslrra.org with any questions about safety awards.

Veterans Engagement Award

ASLRRA’s Veterans Engagement Award honors employers who demonstrate positive policies toward U.S. veterans and who implement unique programs and practices to hire, recognize, support, and engage with veterans in the workplace and the broader community.

View the award criteria here or submit a nomination here. Please contact Sabrina Waiss at swaiss@aslrra.org with questions.
FRA’s Brake Inspection Proposed Rule Published in Federal Register

The Federal Railroad Administration’s notice of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) regarding brake inspections, tests and equipment has been published in the Federal Register.

Proposed changes include formally codifying certain long-standing waivers into the existing regulations. These include waivers providing conditional exceptions to rules regarding air brake testing, end-of-train (EOT) devices, and helper service.

Another key change is an extension of time, up to 24 hours from four, that freight rail equipment can be “off-air” before a new brake inspection is required. Such a change is expected to save on labor and reduce locomotive idling. Other proposals include clarification of existing brake-related regulations and removal of outdated or unnecessary provisions.

Comments on the NPRM must be submitted by March 16. ASLRRA will be submitting comments on behalf of its member railroads.

Report Offers Recommendations for Collecting, Using Data Evaluating Height of Humped Grade Crossings

The Office of Research, Development and Technology at the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has released the results of a study evaluating the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to produce accurate grade-crossing profile data.

While there are guidelines for the height of new or reconstructed grade crossings, there is currently no formula or threshold for determining whether an existing crossing poses a risk to low-ground-clearance vehicles. Accurate grade-crossing profiles can be created by using light detection and ranging (LiDAR) methods on a rail car, but the FRA wanted to determine whether UAVs could produce similar data more easily and cheaply.

Researchers at the John A. Volpe National Transportation Systems Center mounted both photogrammetry and LiDAR devices on UAVs to create 3-dimensional models of humped rail crossings. Both methods resulted in accurate models, but the LiDAR method involved more work and cost to process collected data.

Based on the findings, the report recommends the FRA develop a software tool to analyze 3-D models of grade crossings and establish the number of inches of ground clearance a vehicle would need to safely traverse the crossing. Additionally, it is recommended that the required vehicle ground clearance be included in the FRA grade-crossing inventory database and posted at high-profile crossings.

ASLRRA SAFETY & TRAINING
Reasonable Suspicion Drug & Alcohol Signs and Symptoms Training Video
Visit www.aslrra.org/safety for more info
Bill Restricting Crude Oil Shipment by Rail Introduced in House

On Jan. 8, U.S. Representative John Garamendi (D-Calif.) introduced a bill prohibiting the transportation by rail of crude oil exceeding the New York Mercantile Exchange’s maximum Reid vapor pressure of 9.5 pounds per square inch.

The act, known as the “Crude by Rail Volatility Standard Act,” would remain in effect until the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration finalized its own rule setting a maximum volatility standard.

Senate Passes New North American Trade Deal

Last week the Senate approved the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, or USMCA, by a bipartisan vote of 89-10. The revised North American trade deal is meant to replace the North American Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA, that has been in place since the 1990s.

Rail industry leaders hope the new trade agreement will bring more stability to the shipping market and help boost lagging carload numbers. Freight rail moves a number of goods across America’s northern and southern borders, and the uncertainty created by the lack of a deal hurt business.

The USMCA now needs President Trump’s signature to be made into law. Trump has said he will sign the bill this week.

ASLRRRA New Members

ASLRRRA is delighted to welcome four new associate business members.

Electro-Techno Inc., based in Sherbrooke, Quebec, repairs and refurbishes locomotive electronic components of all brands for the biggest North American railway companies. Our primary contact is President and Vice President of Business Development Ben Lefebvre. Please look for them in Booth #337 at our annual 2020 convention in Grapevine, Texas.
HS Turbochargers America, based in Reno, Nevada, specializes in the manufacture of turbochargers for engine manufacturers around the world. In addition to its OEM business, it is active in the rail industry, offering turbocharger retrofits and upgrades. General Manager Shaawn Cannon is our primary contact. Please look for them in Booth #1102 at our annual 2020 convention in Grapevine, Texas.

National Rail Consulting Group (NRCG), based in Duluth, Minnesota, provides rail consulting services to short line, industrial, finance, public sector and institutional clients. An affiliate of FMW Solutions, LLC, NRCG offers a variety of rail-related services, including rail finance and due diligence services; operations planning and safety training; litigation support and expert witness testimony; grant writing and grant management services; engineering and MOW-related planning services; appraisal services; on-site rail risk management assessments; motive power inspection, assessment, and maintenance planning services; contract “Chief Mechanical Officer” services; and market analyses. Our primary contact is Managing Partner Davidson Ward.

Ohio Crankshaft Company, based in Cleveland, Ohio, is a subsidiary of Park-Ohio Holdings Corp. whose expertise is precision machining of intermediate to large custom-critical parts. The company has a 100-year history and specific expertise in the manufacturing of heavy-duty crankshafts and camshafts, pump shafts, press shafts for internal combustion engines, reciprocating pumps and presses. Director of Business Development Mark Zaremba is our primary contact. Many thanks to our friends from Peaker Services for encouraging them to join the Association.

Webinar subscriptions are now available to non-members. Visit www.aslrра.org/webinars to learn more!

ASLRRA Out and About
Gitchell Attends Uniform Traffic Control Devices Committee Meeting

ASLRRA’s Assistant Vice President of Legislative and Regulatory Policy Crystal Gitchell represented the Association at the January meeting of the National Committee on Uniform Traffic Control Devices, Railroad and Light Rail Grade Crossings Technical Committee. This committee assists in the development of standards and guides for traffic control devices and practices, including the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD).

ASLRA Webinars

Access ASLRRA’s On-Demand Webinars and Learn at Your Own Pace

ASLRRA’s On-Demand Webinars page features over 100 recordings covering subjects for all aspects of railroad operation and management, presented by industry and subject-matter experts. Members can access these archived presentations for free, while non-members can purchase a subscription that offers unlimited access for a designated period of time. View ASLRRA’s most popular titles and see everything the Association has to offer through its On-Demand Resource Library.

Upcoming Webinars

Insights into the RRIF Express Loan Application Process - Jan. 28, 2020

Representatives from The Seneca Group, President David Tennent and Project Director and Senior Analyst Richard Sherman, will provide insight and guidance into the RRIF Express loan application process.

Recruiting and Retaining Veterans and Transitioning Military - Feb. 18, 2020

SPRING President Michele Malski and FASTPORT Executive Director of Military Engagement and Apprenticeships Dave Harrison will explain the benefits of establishing a federally registered apprenticeship program and how to start one.

Click here for more ASLRRA 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.