Registration is Open for Two Don’t-Miss Events: Railroad Day and ASLRA’s Connections Convention

Industry professionals can now register online for both Railroad Day on Capitol Hill in March and ASLRA’s annual Connections Convention May 2-5 in Grapevine, Texas.

Railroad Day, held this year on March 4, offers railroad industry professionals the opportunity to speak with representatives in Congress about key issues. It is the premiere railroading event each year that allows you to tell your story, ensuring lawmakers understand the impact of their decisions. All members of the rail industry, from Class I, II and III railroad personnel to shippers, suppliers, labor rail representatives and others are welcome to attend.

Two months later, ASLRA will be hosting its annual Connections Convention at the Gaylord Texan Resort. This premiere educational event for those in the short line industry, as well as affiliated stakeholders, offers informative general and breakout sessions as well as a number of networking opportunities and social events.

Follow the links above for more information about each event, and to register.

Build America Bureau to Answer Questions About RRIF Express, Application Window Opens Soon

With only a week until the U.S. Department of Transportation begins accepting applications for Railroad Rehabilitation & Improvement Financing (RRIF) Express loans, the USDOT is inviting interested parties to submit questions that will be answered on the RRIF Express website.

The RRIF Express is a pilot program offering expedited, low-cost loans to Class II and III railroads to help modernize aging freight rail infrastructure. The program is meant to ease the burden on small railroads, as applying for regular RRIF loans has often been too complicated and cost prohibitive.

Loan applications will be accepted from Jan. 12 until April 11. Questions about project and prospective borrower eligibility, the application process and other RRIF Express requirements can be submitted via email to RRIFexpress@dot.gov, and the Build America Bureau will post answers at the website link above. Use the link to access more information, including application instructions and a letter of interest form.

Genesee & Wyoming Sale to Brookfield Infrastructure and GIC Finalized

On Dec. 30, ASLRA member Genesee & Wyoming Inc. announced the completion of its sale to affiliates of Brookfield Infrastructure and GIC.
Now that the acquisition is complete, Genesee & Wyoming (G&W) will become a privately held company. As of Dec. 30, G&W common stock ceased trading on the New York Stock Exchange. Each issued and outstanding share of G&W common stock is converted into the right to receive $112 cash.

The sale was first reported in July, with the transaction valued at approximately $8.4 billion, including debt.

“This transaction is an excellent outcome for all G&W stakeholders,” said G&W CEO Jack Hellmann in a press release. “For our customers, employees, and Class I partners, the long-term investment horizon of Brookfield and GIC is perfectly aligned with the long lives of G&W railroad assets. We look forward to building on G&W’s track record of safety, service excellence and commercial growth as we become an important component of a portfolio of global infrastructure assets.”

FRA Ends One Year, Starts the Next with Flurry of Announcements

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) capped off 2019 by issuing two notices of proposed rulemaking (NPRM) and launching a new webpage to report blocked railroad crossings, and started the new year with a final rule extension for short lines and a grant program funding notice.

The FRA’s two proposed rules concern track and brake standards. The first rule would update Track Safety Standards (TSS) to allow continuous rail testing and remove an exception for high-density commuter line inspection. It also makes revisions based on recommendations from the FRA’s Rail Safety Advisory Committee (RSAC).

Proposed changes to regulations concerning brake inspections, tests and equipment would allow trains to go 24 hours between Class I air brake tests, instead of the current four hours. Other amendments would provide relief from provisions concerning single car air brake tests, end-of-train devices, helper service and brake maintenance.

ASLRRA’s safety and regulatory team worked with the FRA during the drafting of these rules, and the Association will be submitting comments in support of both NPRMs.

One day after releasing the two NPRMs, the FRA announced the debut of its new webpage allowing law enforcement officers and members of the public to report blocked highway-rail grade crossings. Through the site, the FRA hopes to gather more information regarding where, when and for how long crossing obstructions occur, and ultimately work with stakeholders to develop solutions to blocked crossing issues.

Early in the new year, the FRA issued other notices. The administration approved ASLRRA’s petition for a 16-month extension for Class II and III railroads to submit a training program for safety-related
railroad employees. The extension does not apply to Class II and III railroads that are intercity or commuter passenger railroads with 400,000 total employee work hours annually or more.

The FRA also issued an [extension and supplemental funding notice](#) for the Restoration and Enhancement Grants Program. Applications for the grants are now due Feb. 5 instead of Jan. 6, and an additional $1,918,600 in grant money has been added. Total available funding is now $26,337,600 for projects that initiate, restore or enhance intercity rail passenger transportation.

**FMCSA Drug Testing Rates to Increase in 2020, PHMSA and FRA Remain the Same**

Starting Jan. 1, the Federal Motor Carriers Safety Administration (FMCSA) will require a higher percentage of minimum annual random controlled substances tests for drivers of commercial motor vehicles (CMVs) requiring a commercial driver’s license (CDL).

The increase to 50 percent of the average number of driver positions from 25 percent is based on the results of the 2018 FMCSA Drug and Alcohol Testing Survey showing that the positive rate for controlled substances random testing rose to 1 percent. The minimum testing rate for alcohol will remain at 10 percent.

For employees covered by the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), the minimum drug-testing rate will remain at 50 percent for 2020, as the random drug test positive rate for the pipeline industry was above 1 percent in 2018. Covered employees include operators of natural gas, hazardous liquid, and carbon dioxide pipelines and operators of liquefied natural gas and underground natural gas storage facilities.

Testing rates for employees covered by the Federal Railroad Administration will not change, staying at 25 percent for drug testing and 10 percent for alcohol. Rates for maintenance-of-way (MOW) employees, albeit higher, will also stay the same as last year, with a required 50 percent for drugs and 25 percent for alcohol.

**Recent Spending Bills Extend 45G, Include Grant Funding**

President Donald Trump signed two spending bills on Dec. 20 that fund the government through Sept. 30, 2020. Included in HR 1865 was an extension of the 45G short line infrastructure tax credit through January 1, 2023.

The tax credit will be applied retroactively to the beginning of 2018, when the credit first expired, and through the end of 2022.
In addition to the tax credit, the transportation, housing and urban development section of one of the bills contains other legislative priority items for ASLRRA and its members. This includes $325 million for fiscal year 2020 Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grants, $1 billion for Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) grants and $2.5 million to fund the Short Line Safety Institute.

The bill also does not include any provisions allowing for increased truck size and weight.

**DeFazio and Malinowski Call for More Analysis of Proposed LNG Ruling**

On Dec. 18 Chair of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Peter DeFazio, and Congressman Tom Malinowski sent a letter to PHMSA Administrator Howard Elliott urging him to conduct more thorough analysis of potential safety risks and employ stricter protections to prevent accidents. The letter was in response to the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration’s (PHMSA) proposed rule allowing for the movement of liquefied natural gas (LNG) by rail tank car.

Comments on the rule are being accepted until Jan. 13 after PHMSA granted an extension based on requests from the attorneys general of New York and Maryland.

ASLRRA and the Association of American Railroads (AAR) submitted comments in support of the rule on Dec. 20, arguing that transporting LNG by rail is safer than by motor vehicle, which is currently permitted. The associations also suggested PHMSA not adopt many of the operational controls being considered, such as limits on train length.

![DISASTER PREPAREDNESS RESOURCES](https://www.aslrra.org/disasterprep)

**ASLRRA Out and About**

**Association VP Keeney Represents ASLRRA at West Coast Conference**

ASLRRA Vice President Membership and Business Development Kathy Keeney staffed the Association’s booth at this week’s National Railroad Construction and Maintenance Association (NRC) and Railway Engineering-Maintenance Suppliers Association (REMSA) conference in Coronado, Calif.

Keeney reported good traffic at the ASLRRA booth, where she enjoyed speaking with attendees about membership as well as sponsorship and exhibit options for the Association’s annual Connections convention.

Conference highlights included an exposition hall located in a tent on the beach as well as an informative fireside chat with CP President and CEO Keith Creel. Several ASLRRA members, including Watco, Genesee & Wyoming Railroad Services, OmniTRAX, Montana Rail Link, Metra and Brightline/Virgin Trains provided 2020 capital spending forecasts.
ASLRRRA Announcements

Profile of South Carolina Short Line Gives Readers a Glimpse of Day in the Life of a Small Railroad

To further tell the short line story, ASLRRRA will profile some of its members who are noteworthy movers and shakers in the railroad industry. The savvy decision-making and ingenuity of our railroad members make their business achievements worth sharing.

A recent feature on the South Carolina Living website offers readers an intimate view of ASLRRRA member Greenville & Western Railway, helping them see what it is like to operate a short line railroad in rural America.

The article follows engineer Allen Gibbs and conductor Dennis Martin on one of their thrice-weekly runs on a 13-mile stretch between Honea Path and Pelzer, S.C., pairing a description of the men’s day with tidbits about the short line industry. For instance, an account of Martin inspecting the air hose connections on their rail cars is coupled with explanations of the air brake system and the ways safety has improved industry-wide. A note that both Gibbs and Martin are qualified as – and do the jobs of – engineers and conductors highlights the fact that many short line railroaders perform multiple tasks to keep their companies moving.

“On the Greenville & Western everyone’s got an engineer’s card and everyone’s got a conductor’s card,” Gibbs said in the article. “Small lines are like that everywhere. Everyone is trained on everything. With a big carrier it would take years to work your way to being an engineer.”

When they are not running Greenville & Western locomotives on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, Gibbs and Martin operate the 19-mile Aikens Railway. Both railroads are subsidiaries of Western Carolina Railway Service Corporation, owned by Steven Hawkins and his wife, Cheryl. Together the railroads haul thousands of carloads a year and serve a variety of customers, including Belton Industries, Belton Metal Company, Komatsu America, Advanced Glass Yarns, Grace Davison and Active Minerals.

“I like the variety here on the Greenville & Western,” Gibbs said. “There are a lot of different jobs that need to be done; one day I might be running a train and the next day I might be cutting back brush from the tracks. It keeps things interesting.”

“I take a lot of pride in what I do,” he added. “These locomotives are million-dollar pieces of equipment, and it’s a lot of responsibility. I’m proud the company trusts me to handle a piece of equipment like this, and I’m going to make sure I do it correctly.”

With Access to ASLRRRA’s On-Demand Webinar Library, Users Will Never Miss Our Most Popular Webinars

ASLRRRA’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.

Some of the available recordings include the most popular presentations of 2019, like the Railroad Retirement Board's Three-Part Series; FRA Regulatory & Program Requirements for Short Lines, Part 1; Ops Testing with Employee Performance Tracking for Compliance; Making the Digital Shift to Safety Culture; Diagnosis, Protocol, Compliance and Regulation - A Guide to Better Understanding Sleep Apnea; and Effective On-the-Job Training (OJT) Strategies. These and more can be found in ASLRRRA’s On-Demand Resource Library.
ASLRRRA Webinars

Upcoming Webinars

FRA Regulatory & Program Requirements for Short Lines, Part 2 - Jan. 14, 2020 (NOTE: Date has changed)

In part two of this two-part series, ASLRRRA 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.

Click here for more ASLRRRA events.

Industry Events

UT’s Transportation Assistance Program Helps Railroad Professionals Understand Bridge Inspections

The University of Tennessee at Knoxville’s Tennessee Transportation Assistance Program offers railroad-related classes for those in the industry. Two separate Railroad Bridge Inspection classes will be held May 13-15 in Knoxville and May 19-21 in Galveston, Texas.

The bridge inspection course teaches bridge terminology, components and component functions, as well as inspection procedures and process documentation. More details, including a course agenda and registration information, can be found at the respective links above.

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.