Association President Chuck Baker Touts Recent Industry Wins in Progressive Railroading Articles

Progressive Railroading magazine recently featured ASLRRRA President Chuck Baker in several articles, including a guest commentary in February. Each time, Baker noted the recent successes that will benefit the short line industry.

In his February commentary, Baker highlighted the new offshoot of the Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF) loan program, a pilot program known as RRIF Express. The RRIF Express is meant to reduce the amount of time and money spent on securing a loan for infrastructure improvement, which will make the loans more accessible to short line and regional railroads.

Baker focused primarily on the newly extended 45G short line tax credit in the other Progressive Railroading articles, one solely discussing the 45G extension and the other addressing rail’s top policy priorities in 2020. In the first, Baker talked about the hope that the credit’s five-year extension will allow short lines to plan bigger, more long-term projects. He also applauded the efforts of all those who worked to make the extension a reality.

When discussing 45G in the article about rail issues in 2020, Baker said that “a permanent or even longer-term extension of the 45G tax credit” is a “major priority.” The article further identified a number of other issues the railroad industry hopes lawmakers will address this year, particularly regarding surface transportation reauthorization, since the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation (FAST) Act expires Sept. 30.

With little time to write an expansive bill, Baker said that Congress would most likely pass a shorter-term extension of the FAST Act and let next year’s Congress expand it further.

“But, there will be a legitimate effort to write the legislation this year,” continued Baker. “And I think they’ll make a lot of progress on it.”

Railroad Day 2020 Participants Should Register for Training Webinars

ASLRRRA will host three webinars for registered participants to explain how to conduct Hill visits and how to get meeting schedules on the Railroad Day app. Please follow the link to sign up for a webinar, which will be held Feb. 26, Feb. 28 and March 2. Each webinar covers the same information, so participants only need to register for one.

Railroad Day on Capitol Hill is one of the industry’s biggest annual events, gathering hundreds of railroaders from across the nation in Washington, D.C. to speak with lawmakers about the most pressing issues facing the industry. This year’s event is March 4, and there is still time to register to attend.
The day’s schedule includes breakfast and check-in at the Hyatt Regency Capitol Hill, followed by a full day of various appointments at the Capitol, and concluding with an evening reception at Union Station.

**CN Starts to Restore Service Through Western Canada After Government Order Amendment**

Canadian National Railway (CN) has lifted its week-old embargo on movement of dangerous goods in Western Canada, including crude oil, propane and toxic inhalation hazard materials. The move, effective at noon on Feb. 17, was a response to an amendment to the ministerial order that revised speed restrictions for trains carrying dangerous goods.

The Canadian government’s original order, issued Feb. 7, lowered the speed limit of trains with 20 or more hazardous materials cars to 20 mph through metropolitan areas and 25 mph everywhere else. The decision was made after a Canadian Pacific Railway train carrying oil derailed and caught fire near Guernsey, Saskatchewan. It was the second such derailment in that area in two months.

In a press release, CN supported the government’s Feb. 16 revised order, which breaks trains into “higher risk key trains” and “key trains” categories, with new, higher speed limits for each. The new speed limits also vary depending on the areas through which the trains are traveling. With the adjusted speeds, the company will be better able to restore business on its Western Canada routes.

Still, however, CN noted its embargoes remain in place for its Eastern Canada and US networks affected by rail blockades protesting the proposed Coastal GasLink pipeline in British Columbia.

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**FRA Risk Reduction Program Requirements Published**

The Federal Railroad Administration issued a final rule requiring certain railroads to develop risk reduction plans that will need to be approved by the regulatory agency.

The rule, which was required by the Rail Safety Improvement Act of 2008, will apply to Class I railroads as well as smaller railroads with inadequate safety performance. Other railroads not subject to the requirement can voluntarily submit Risk Reduction Program plans, DOT says.

ASLRA is reviewing the document for its impact on short line railroads.
**DOT Issues NOFO For BUILD Grants**

The Office of the Secretary, Department of Transportation (DOT) has issued a notice of funding opportunity for Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development, or “BUILD Transportation Grants,” program. The $1B in funding appropriated for the FY 2020 BUILD Transportation grants program are to be awarded on a competitive basis for surface transportation infrastructure projects that will have a significant local or regional impact. Applications are due May 18, 2020.

**FRA Offers Free Track and Railroad Workplace Safety Symposium in May**

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) will host a free safety event geared toward track maintenance and construction employees in the railroad industry.

This first-ever [FRA Track & Railroad Workplace Safety Symposium](#) will be held May 19-21 in Louisville, Ky. Approximately 180 FRA track inspectors and specialists are expected to attend, and the event is geared to employees of all experience levels, including track inspectors, maintenance foremen, roadmasters or other track supervisors, construction managers and senior-level engineering managers.

Breakout sessions will cover topics such as derailment prevention, rail defect detection trends and best practices, and FRA regulatory guidelines. The FRA is also welcoming recommendations for other breakout session topics, and is seeking subject-matter experts to lead various sessions.

Registration is now open, but space is limited to the first 700 people who sign up. Follow the link above to learn more, submit ideas and register.

**ODAPC Notice Offers Guidance Regarding Use of CBD Products by Safety-Sensitive Employees**

The U.S. Department of Transportation’s Office of Drug and Alcohol Policy and Compliance (ODAPC) has issued a notice responding to inquiries concerning the use of cannabidiol (CBD) products by safety-sensitive employees subject to drug testing specified under 49 CFR part 40.

The notice reminds employers and safety-sensitive employees that the Department of Transportation requires testing for marijuana, not CBD, but users should be cautious because CBD products can be mislabeled and contain more tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) than stated, resulting in a positive drug test. Because the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not certify levels of THC in CBD products, no federal oversight ensures the accuracy of product labels.

According to ODAPC, “It remains unacceptable for any safety-sensitive employee subject to the Department of Transportation’s drug testing regulations to use marijuana. Since the use of CBD products could lead to a positive drug test result, Department of Transportation-regulated safety-sensitive employees should exercise caution when considering whether to use CBD products.”

**Newest Version of General Code of Operating Rules Now Available for Purchase**

The eighth edition of the General Code of Operating Rules (GCOR) is now available for purchase online.

Railroads adhering to the GCOR can choose from three different book sizes. Also available is an electronic version of the book on CD, which allows railroads to print their own copies, and a transition guide outlining the changes made in the eighth edition compared to the seventh.
Don’t Miss Out on Railroad Day 2020

Join 260 of your industry colleagues on March 4, 2020! Railroad Day is an opportunity for Congress to see short line rail industry’s critical contributions to the freight industry across the nation. More than 30 percent of industrial and agricultural freight rail traffic in the United States originates or terminates on a short line railroad. The opportunity to explain our national scope and importance to so many members of Congress is unparalleled in congressional day visits.

Schedule a Visit to Your Railroad or Location with a Congressional Representative

Nobody can tell the story of short line rail’s importance to the U.S. economy better than you! Consider inviting a member of Congress out to see the impact for themselves. Contact Jacob Carter for assistance in setting up a visit at 202-715-2917.
ASLRRA New Members

ASLRRA is delighted to welcome three associate business members.

Boll Filter Corporation, based in Novi, Mich., is a leading manufacturer of filter and filter media for liquids and gases. Its systems are used worldwide for the safety, reliability, and protection of machines, engines, and production plants with applications that include fuel and lubrication oil filtration of engines used in locomotives, ships, and power plants. Our primary contact is Sales Manager - Engine & Locomotive Mike Mews.

Railway Logix Services Inc., based in Sebastopol, Miss., serves multiple short lines, regionals, municipalities, industries and Class I’s throughout the Midwest and Southeast. It currently maintains nearly 100 grade crossing warning systems for customers, providing 24/7 response to emergency callouts. It also represents its customers during federal and state inspections and/or re-enactment situations. Our primary contact is CFO Wilbur (Ernie) Marshall. Please look for them in Booth #932 at our annual Connections convention this May in Grapevine, Texas.

Voltabox of Texas, based in Cedar Park, Texas, provides advanced battery systems for industrial applications. Its battery systems are efficient and suitable for long-term use in public transportation, large scale motive, mining, hybrid, battery-electric and other industrial vehicles. Our primary contact is Senior Sales Manager Tyler Meck. ASLRRA is pleased to welcome Voltabox back as an associate business member.

ASLRRA Training Seminars

April 14-16
Advanced DSLE and Labor Relations

May 19-20
Leadership Development, Regulatory Module

June 23-25
General Code of Operating Rules

Click here to register
ASLRRA Announcements

Complete All 2019 FRA Reports By Feb. 29 to be Eligible for this Year’s ASLRRA Jake Awards

ASLRRA is gearing up to announce 2019 Jake Award winners! To be eligible for a Jake Award, railroad and switching members must complete the required Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) accident/incident reports for every month of 2019.

To ensure Jake Awards are given in a timely and fair manner, any reports submitted after Feb. 29 will not be considered. For more information, please see the FRA’s guidance on accident/incident reporting or contact Fred Oelsner at foelsner@aslrra.org.

Veterans Engagement Award Nominations Due Feb. 28

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

ASLRRA railroad and supplier members are invited to submit a nomination explaining how the company has engaged with veterans in the workplace and/or community in the past year; how the company has supported or recognized veterans in the workplace and/or community; and how the company has targeted veterans in its hiring practices.

Nominations for the 2020 award may be submitted online here. The application deadline is Feb. 28 and the winner will be recognized during the opening general session at ASLRRA’s Annual Convention on Monday, May 4, in Grapevine, Texas. Please contact Sabrina Waiss at swaiss@aslrra.org with questions.

Promote Your Business at this Year’s ASLRRA Connections Convention

ASLRRA Connections offers a wide range of sponsorship opportunities to fit nearly every budget. A sponsorship investment is a prime way to promote your company, reinforce your brand, build your presence and raise your industry profile at the only convention dedicated to the short line and regional railroad industry.

A sponsorship commitment guarantees valuable exposure before approximately 1800 attendees and is an investment that will pay dividends long after the trade show ends. Please contact Kathy Keeney on (202) 585-3439 for more information.

Advertising in the official convention program is another opportunity to get your company’s name and message in front of short line decision makers. Ad pricing starts at under $1,000 for the color, glossy program, which is distributed to all attendees. Please contact Danielle Richards on (202) 585-3443 for details.
ASLRRA Out and About

ASLRRA’s Gelnar Represents the Association at FAMES Meeting in Florida

The Fatality Analysis of Maintenance-of-Way Employees and Signalmen (FAMES) Committee met Feb. 11-12 in Jacksonville, Fla. at CSX headquarters to review two fatalities and discuss the review of past watchman and lookout recommendations. ASLRRA’s Vice President of Safety and Compliance JR Gelnar represented the Association at the meeting.

The group also discussed the success of the recently released roadway maintenance machines with a boom/crane video, as well as the possibility of releasing future videos.

ASLRRA Webinars

Upcoming Webinars

FRA Penalties and Violations - Feb. 19, 2020

ASLRRA’s Senior Vice President of Safety and Regulatory Policy Jo Strang, along with Vice President of Safety and Compliance JR Gelnar, will discuss options available to short lines concerning how to prepare for and interact with inspectors during an audit, and available options when a violation has been received. Most short lines are considered a small business, requiring special actions from the FRA.

Emergency Docket Waivers - March 11, 2020

The FRA administrator can activate an emergency relief docket if extreme conditions constitute an emergency event to railroad operations. This webinar will explain emergency dockets and provide instruction on how to file a waiver petition for temporary relief from certain safety regulations. ASLRRA’s Senior Vice President of Safety and Regulatory Policy Jo Strang and Vice President of Safety and Compliance JR Gelnar will conduct the webinar.

Recruiting and Retaining Veterans and Transitioning Military - March 19, 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

Virginia Tech Organizations to Host Free Transportation Industry Professional Development Opportunity

The Virginia Tech Transportation Institute and the Virginia Tech chapter of WTS International are hosting a free networking and professional development event titled Women in Transportation 2020: Connections Through Transportation. The event will be held March 27 at the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) Boardroom and Conference Center in Washington, D.C.

Speakers include representatives from the NTSB, including board member Jennifer Homendy, as well as a motivational speaker and an afternoon keynote address from Ann Brach of the Transportation Research Board.

The NTSB and Transportation YOU, a U.S. Department of Transportation outreach program, are co-hosting the event. Although the event is geared toward women, all are welcome to attend.

Click here for a listing of industry events.