Hundreds Convene Today on Capitol Hill for Railroad Day

As this newsletter is landing in inboxes around the country, 450 railroad industry colleagues are participating in 330 meetings across Capitol Hill, talking about the issues most important to railroads and their stakeholders. Railroad Day on Capitol Hill began today with check-in at 7:30 a.m. and, after a full day of meetings, will end with an evening reception at Union Station.

Industry members will be encouraging their represented officials to a) create permanence for the Short Line Railroad 45G Tax Credit in the upcoming Surface Transportation Reauthorization bill, b) decline to increase the size and weight of trucks on the nation’s already beleaguered roadways, and c) preserve the balanced economic regulatory environment for freight railroads.

Railroad Day, which was first held almost 20 years ago, is one of the most organized and comprehensive industry days in Washington, D.C. The gathering includes representatives from all sides of the freight rail table, including Class I railroads, short line railroads, labor, shippers and manufacturers that support the rail industry.

CDC Offers Tips for Dealing With COVID-19 in the Workplace, Preparing an Outbreak Response Plan

In order to help prevent the spread of acute respiratory illness, including the coronavirus disease, or COVID-19, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued interim guidance for businesses and employers.

The CDC’s guidance offers strategies employers can use now, such as encouraging sick employees to stay home, emphasizing good hand hygiene and cough and sneeze etiquette, and performing routine cleaning of frequently touched surfaces.

In addition, the guide lists planning considerations for employers in the event of an outbreak in the U.S., as well as tips for creating an infectious disease outbreak response plan. For more information on the disease itself, including general information, situation updates and travel guidelines, go to the CDC’s coronavirus disease 2019 page here.

Donate to ASLRRA’s Silent Auction and Help Support the Short Line Education Fund

ASLRRA’s Silent Auction is always a popular part of its annual Connections convention, and much of the fun comes from the opportunity to win wonderful prizes donated by the Association’s generous members.

Proceeds from the auction go to the Short Line Education Fund, which supports a range of high priority industry education, communications and research initiatives. Last year’s auction raised over $25,000.
All donations are welcome, and because the Short Line Education Fund is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization, donations are tax-deductible.

To donate, simply complete the 2020 Auction Donation Form. Industry equipment, products and services are particularly desirable. Additional suggested donations include vacation home stays, hotel accommodations, airfare vouchers, electronics, jewelry, luxury and designer goods, gift cards, event tickets, and all things train related. For more information or to discuss a donation, please contact Sabrina Waiss at swaiss@aslrra.org.

---

**STB Issues Final Rule Regarding Demurrage Regulations**

In a Feb. 28 press release, the Surface Transportation Board (STB) announced it has adopted a final rule clarifying demurrage regulations.

The STB’s final rule affects class exemption regulations for certain commodities and boxcar transportation, amending the regulations so it is clear exemptions do not apply to demurrage regulation.

Although the STB solicited and reviewed comments on the rule after first issuing the notice of proposed rulemaking in October, the board has adopted the final rule as it was originally put forth. It will go into effect April 3.

ASLRRRA submitted comments in November regarding the proposed rule, recommending no action be taken on the matter but noting that, if action was taken, Class II and III railroads should be exempt from the regulation due to a lack of evidence railroad demurrage practices involving exempt commodities were problematic and required regulatory oversight.

---

**Notice of Funding Opportunity Issued for Port Infrastructure Development Program**

The U.S. Department of Transportation’s Maritime Administration (MARAD) has issued a notice of funding opportunity for the Port Infrastructure Development Program (PIDP), which will award $225 million in grants to projects improving coastal seaports, inland river ports and Great Lakes ports.

Funding can be used for facilities within, connecting to, out of, or around ports. This can be beneficial to railroads, as many short line and regional railroads move goods into and out of ports nationwide. Several awards for fiscal year 2019 will allow railroads operating in and near certain ports to improve their facilities.

Applications for PIDP grants are due May 18. View the notice of funding opportunity at the link above or click on the PIDP link to learn more about the grant program. And remember, ASLRRRA’s Member Discount Program features preferred providers who offer grant-writing assistance to Association members.
Final Rule from Federal Railroad Administration Amends Regulations for Passenger Rail Safety System Program

In a final rule, the Federal Railroad Administration has amended regulations requiring commuter and intercity passenger rail operations to develop and implement a system safety program (SSP).

The rule clarifies the responsibility of passenger rail operations to ensure their own compliance with the SSP final rule. It also adjusts SSP rule compliance dates and amends the rule to apply information protections to the Confidential Close Call Reporting System.

The FRA will also make similar amendments to the Risk Reduction Program (RRP) final rule to ensure the RRP and SSP rules have essentially identical consultation and information protection provisions.

ASLRA’s Senior Vice President of Safety and Regulatory Policy Jo Strang will review the new rule for its impact on short lines.

U.S. Trade Development Agency Issues Call for Companies Interested in Creating Technical Assistance

The U.S. Trade and Development Agency (USTDA), in partnership with the Asociación Mexicana de Ferrocarriles (AMF), is seeking proposals from U.S. companies interested in creating a Technical Assistance for the development of an investment plan for railroad crossing safety improvements throughout Mexico.

Only U.S. firms and individuals are eligible to bid on the project, and the chosen firm will be paid from a USDTA grant. Proposals are due April 1. Follow this link to view the original proposal solicitation letter. Interested applicants can submit a request for a full request proposal form here.

Representatives Announce RRIF Expansion Legislation, Gitchell Attends

New Hampshire Representatives Annie Kuster and Chris Pappas joined Pennsylvania Representative Lloyd Smucker in unveiling the Invest in American Railroads Act on Feb. 24, which would expand the Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing Program (RRIF).

ASLRA’s Assistant Vice President of Legislative and Regulatory Policy Crystal Gitchell joined approximately 40 local, state and federal officeholders and rail executives for the announcement at a roundtable rail discussion in New Hampshire.
The bill would expand the use of funding under the RRIF program, allowing the U.S. Department of Transportation to issue funds to public or private entities to rehabilitate or build new track, bridges, rail yards and other support structures.

ASLRRRA’s Crystal Gitchell, left, greets New Hampshire Representative Annie Kuster at a roundtable meeting where Kuster announced legislation to expand access to Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF) loans.

ASLRRRA New Members

ASLRRRA is delighted to welcome seven new railroad and supplier members.

Alabama Export Railroad, a subsidiary of Mississippi Export Railroad, is a transportation service company providing freight rail service in Mobile, Alabama. ALE operates 12 miles of track and connects at Mobile with CN, CSX, NS, KCS, CGR, TASD, AGR as well as the Port of Mobile.

Alabama Export Railroad

Florida Gulf & Atlantic Railroad, a Tallahassee, Florida-based subsidiary of RailUSA, serves the panhandle of Florida and southern Georgia and has 430 miles of track and three subdivisions. Commodities hauled include aggregates, agricultural products, cement, chemicals, clay, construction materials, lumber, and metals.

Florida Gulf & Atlantic Railroad
Muller Bohlin & Associates, Inc., based in Jersey City, N.J., provides a consulting service to secure state and federal funding for clients to support the expansion and/or rehabilitation of railroads. Our primary contact is President Tiffany A. Bohlin. Many thanks to Muller Bohlin for being a Silver Sponsor of today’s Railroad Day event in Washington, D.C.

Nexxiot, based in McKinney, Texas, is a service provider that streamlines supply chains. It leverages its expertise in industrial IoT to deliver visibility to supply chains and asset fleets, making efficient management as seamless and effortless as possible. Our primary contact is Account Manager Mark Fernandez.

RailcarRx, based in Irvin, Texas, is a leading IT provider of software products and services with numerous years of expertise in custom software development for companies in the rail industry. RailcarRx's software products include RailcarRx Repair Management System for railcar repair facilities, RailcarRx INSIGHT for car owners and shippers, and RailcarRx CRB System for railroads. Our primary contact is Director of Operations Josh Lippy. Please visit them in Booth #1018 at our annual convention in Grapevine, Texas to learn more. We are pleased to welcome them back as members.

Texas Gonzales & Northern Railway, a subsidiary of TNW Corp., has been providing rail transport, storage and operations for companies in the heartland of Texas since 1992. Located midway between Gonzales and Harwood, TXGN owns and/or manages 13 miles of lead track and approximately 61 miles of storage and loop track. It interchanges with Union Pacific.

Texas Rock Crusher Railway, a subsidiary of TNW Corp., has been serving the rail transport, storage and operations needs of companies in Central Texas since 1988. TXR operates more than six miles of owned and customer-leased track at their Brownwood, TX location. It interchanges with BNSF and serves the Camp Bowie Industrial Area, a 100-acre facility that houses major manufacturers and service providers.
ASLRRA Announcements

Chuck Baker Chosen to Lead Board of Newly Reorganized OneRail Coalition

ASLRRA President Chuck Baker has been named chair of the OneRail Coalition’s board of directors, after OneRail recently completed its reorganization as a 501(c)(6) nonprofit organization.

The reorganization means OneRail will now function as a nonprofit organization separate from the Surface Transportation Policy Project under which it previously operated, necessitating the appointment of a new board. ASLRRA is a member of the coalition, which works to educate Americans about the importance of a strong freight and passenger rail system.

“With this new structure and our own board of directors, OneRail starts a new chapter in its mission to educate policymakers and the public on the importance of freight, passenger and commuter rail to the U.S. economy,” said OneRail Director Anne Canby in a press release.

Reserve a Booth at ASLRRA’s Connections Convention Expo Hall Before They Sell Out

Our Connections convention Expo Hall at the Gaylord Texan is Texas sized, but it is filling up quickly. More than 75 percent of booth space in the Expo Hall has been sold for ASLRRA’s annual convention. There is still time to reserve your space, though. Please contact ASLRRA’s Kathy Keeney via email or on (202) 585-3439 for more information today. Not sure if your company has a booth already or if your competitors are exhibiting? Please click here to see a list of exhibitors.

ASLRRA Out and About

Association Representatives Attend Meetings in D.C., Tennessee and Florida

Members of ASLRRA’s staff traveled through parts of the South in the past week to participate in various industry meetings.

Jo Strang, ASLRRA’s senior vice president of safety and regulatory policy and chair of Operation Lifesaver’s board of directors, recently led the national Operation Lifesaver (OLI) board meeting in Nashville, Tenn. The group edited a new three-year strategic plan, with an approval vote scheduled for next week. Strang also met with the State Coordinators and OLI’s National Advisory Committee.

Strang and ASLRRA’s new General Counsel Sarah Yurasko represented the short line railroad industry at the Federal Railroad Administration’s (FRA) Railroad Safety Advisory Committee Accident Reporting Working Group meeting in Washington, D.C. on Feb. 26th. The working group is considering changes to the FRA accident reporting cause codes and the regulatory text in 49 C.F.R. Part 225.

Additionally, ASLRRA’s Vice President of Safety and Compliance JR Gelnar represented short lines at the Association of American Railroads (AAR) Security Committee meeting in Jacksonville, Fla. Feb. 25-27. The committee discussed security assessments, various security scenarios and comments regarding drone security.
ASLRRA Webinars

Review Data and Analytics Topics With ASLRRA’s On-Demand Webinars

In 2019, CloudMoyo worked with ASLRRA to sponsor and present a series of webinars. Topics included data and analytics, on-the-job training strategies and digital tools to improve compliance. The webinar titles are:

- Making the Digital Shift to Safety Culture: Using Analytics and Automation to Simplify Crew Manager Tasks
- Effective On-the-Job Training Strategies
- Ops Testing with Employee Performance Tracking for Compliance
- Digitalize REN & ISS to Improve Compliance & Settlements

Those who may have missed the webinars can still view them. All four are available as recordings in ASLRRA’s On-Demand Webinar library, and ASLRRA members can access the recordings for free. Non-members can have unlimited on-demand webinar access with a purchase a 90-day or one-year subscription.

In addition to on-demand webinars, ASLRRA is always working to provide its members with top-notch education, bringing industry and subject-matter experts right to your desk. Find out about our upcoming live webinars below, and use the links to learn more or register.

Upcoming Webinars

Emergency Docket Waivers - March 12, 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 docket 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.

Employer Training Resources: Registered Apprenticeships - 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.
45G - What to Do Now That It’s Renewed - March 25, 2020

45G has been renewed for five years, and the renewal comes with some special rules relating to retroactivity, accrual versus cash-basis taxpayers, 45G expenditures versus income tax expenditures, and more. In this webinar, David Ayoub and Rick Tidd, partners-in-charge at Bowers & Company, CPAs, will explain these rules and discuss how short lines can take advantage of this important credit.

Click here for more ASLRRRA 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.