May 27, 2020

ASLRRRA Welcomes Legislation to Improve RRIF

ASLRRRA President Chuck Baker recently issued a statement in support of the proposed Railroad Rehabilitation and Financing Innovation Act (RRFIA), which was introduced by Senator John Thune (R-S.D.) and Senator Maggie Hassan (D-N.H.) on May 21.

The RRFIA is meant to improve the Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing (RRIF) loan program, which was created for small railroads but currently features burdensome requirements that discourage short lines from applying for funding.

As Baker points out in his statement, the current RRIF program is “promising but underutilized and frequently frustrating,” with only one short line loan approved in the past eight years. Baker notes that the newly proposed RRFIA “would certainly improve the RRIF program and make it more viable for short lines.”

Benefits include a streamlined application process, improved program flexibility and the authorization of funds to reduce application costs and credit risk premium charges.

“With these changes and a commitment from the USDOT to make the program work, RRIF loans can be an attractive long-term financing option for short line railroads,” wrote Baker, “and these changes will enable more short line railroads to bring qualified, necessary projects forward that will improve efficiency and safety, and enhance freight rail service for thousands of shippers across the country.”

ASLRRRA Elects New Board Member, Adds Environmental Committee, and Appoints New Finance & Administration Committee Chair

ASLRRRA held its semi-annual Board of Directors Meeting on May 19, 2020 via Zoom call. At the meeting Dan Sabin, President, Iowa Northern Railway Company, was elected as the small railroad-at-large member to the board for a 3 year term, replacing Jack Parliament, who retired from the D&I Railroad Company in December 2019. Sabin will also serve as the Small Railroad Committee Chair. ASLRRRA Chair Doc Claussen created the Environmental Committee as a standing committee of the Association. The Committee is charged with helping tell the broader railroad story about sustainability and environmental benefits and will be Chaired by Sean Strong, AVP of Environmental, Watco Companies, LLC. Finally, Nicole Teska, Partner, Bowers & Company, CPAs LLC, was appointed as Chair of the Finance & Administration Committee replacing Barry McClure, Executive Vice President, Ironhorse Resources, Inc. who was serving as the interim Chair.
View Railroad Town Hall, Hosted by ASLRRA President Baker, Through Our On-Demand Webinars Library

Those who may have been unable to participate in ASLRRA’s virtual town hall discussing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on short line railroad operations, “How Short Lines Are Adapting Workplaces and Serving Customers,” can view a recording of the event online through ASLRRA’s On-Demand Webinars library.

ASLRRA President Chuck Baker moderated the discussion, which also featured J.R. Gelnar of ASLRRA, Mike Lundell of Genesee & Wyoming Railroad Services, Inc., Daniel Hamilton of the Indiana Rail Road Company, and Travis Herod of Watco Companies.

ASLRRA thanks supplier member PS Technology for their generous sponsorship of this event.

The dialogue covered a range of topics, from the approach railroads have taken to transporting operating and engineering crews, locomotive sanitation, policies and procedures, to reopening administration offices and more.

Members interested in watching the recording can do so for free, while non-members can purchase a subscription to view this and the many other recorded webinars available online.

ASLRRA Welcomes Summer Intern

David Konarske has begun his internship with the ASLRRA policy team, assisting with research on legislative and regulatory issues, and will help with ASLRRA’s data collection initiative. David is a law student at Michigan State University College of Law and has worked as a conductor with the Adrian and Blissfield Rail Road.

FRA Grants ASLRRA Request for Certain Waiver Extensions Due to COVID-19
ASLRRA petitioned the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for the extension of select waivers on May 14, and on May 21 the FRA granted a 60-day waiver extension. The waivers had previously been granted under COVID-19 Emergency Relief, Emergency Docket FRA-2020-0002.

With the extension, applicable waivers will now expire July 21. Railroads utilizing waivers must still submit weekly reports according to the same waiver-specific reporting requirements. An updated summary template is available on ASLRRA’s COVID-19 regulatory response resource website.

Although the extension has been granted for some waivers, others are no longer in effect. Please see the full list on ASLRRA’s website. Those with questions should contact ASLRRA Vice President of Safety and Compliance JR Gelnar at jrgelnar@aslrra.org.

Department of Homeland Security Suspends Travel to Mexico Through June 22, 2020

In a notice dated 5/21/2020, the Department of Homeland Security extended its earlier restrictions on travel through land ports of entry along the U.S.-Mexico border, and will continue to suspend normal operations and will only allow processing for entry into the United States of those travelers engaged in “essential travel.” This does not apply to freight rail travel.

STB Adopts Final Rule for Rail Service Reporting Data

The Surface Transportation Board (STB) adopted a final rule for reporting chemical and plastics rail service data as a part of Class I railroads’ weekly “cars-held” reporting metric.

Certain chemical and plastics traffic will now be a distinct reporting category, which the STB and its stakeholders believe will enable the board to better monitor the traffic of such commodities and detect and mitigate related service issues.

The rule will become effective on July 20 and applies to all Class I rail carriers and the Chicago Transportation Coordination Office through its Class I members.

ASLRRA SAFETY & TRAINING
Reasonable Suspicion Drug & Alcohol Signs and Symptoms Training Video
Visit www.aslrra.org/safety for more info
May 27, 2020

ASLRRA Submits Letter Supporting Legislation for Essential Workers

On May 20, ASLRRA joined other organizations in submitting a letter to the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation in support of bill S. 3728, the Critical Infrastructure Employee Protection Act of 2020.

The bill, which did not move to the floor or markup, would have required the Secretary of Transportation to support the efforts of state and local governments to provide for priority COVID-19 testing of essential critical infrastructure workers, as well as other necessary supplies.

The letter thanked lawmakers for their effort to ensure employees in critical industries have access to the equipment necessary to stay safe while doing their jobs. ASLRRA and others emphasized the need for such efforts as the ending of movement restrictions could further increase demand for testing and protective supplies.

ASLRRA Announcements

eVerifile’s Short Line Program Helps Small Railroads Screen Third-Party Contractors

ASLRRA preferred provider eVerifile’s eShortLine program combines security, convenience and trusted expertise to reduce supplier and employee risk for short line railroads. This uniquely tailored program eases the burden and cost of screening and onboarding third-party contractors. ASLRRA members receive exclusive discounted pricing.

Program benefits include: multiple package options to fit individual railroad needs; industry expertise with more than a decade of experience; a trusted provider ensuring workplace safety since 1999; and efficiency and consistency. The company is a single-source provider of background screening, verifications, drug testing, physicals, training, testing and badging.

Visit our Member Discount Program website to learn about eVerifile and eShortLine. The eShortLine program is an extension of eRailSafe, the Class I railroad workplace safety program administered by eVerifile for more than a decade. Members interested in becoming preferred providers with ASLRRA’s Member Discount Program can contact Senior Vice President of Education and Business Services Sabrina Waiss at swaiss@aslrra.org.
ASLRRRA Webinars

Upcoming Webinars

45G – What to Do Now That It’s Renewed - June 2, 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.

Lease Arrangement with PTC-220 & Operational Information - June 4, 2020

This webinar is an introduction to PTC-220, the company that owns and manages the spectrum that is a key component necessary to support interoperable positive train control in the U.S. This webinar provides an overview of PTC-220, what it is, what it does, and explains the ways Class II and III tenant railroads would interact with PTC-220 to support their PTC operations.

FRA and NARN Partnership to Build, Maintain & Use GIS Data - June 10, 2020

The North American Rail Network (NARN) is a geographic information systems database hosted by the FRA and containing mainline railroad track centerlines throughout the U.S., Canada and Mexico. The FRA’s Raquel Wright and other systems specialists will discuss the significance of the NARN and its potential uses by railroads, and will explain how short line railroads might partner with the FRA to share and maintain data.

Click here for more ASLRRRA events.

Industry Events

Introduction to NEPA and FRA’s Categorical Exclusions Webinar

On Wednesday June 10, at 2:00pm EST, join the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for a webinar to help you navigate the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. FRA Environmental Protection Specialists will show you how NEPA is key to delivering your project in a timely manner.

Webinar participants will receive a high-level overview of the NEPA process and practical strategies for FRA project development and environmental document preparation. Participants will also acquire tips and tools to complete FRA’s categorical exclusion (CE) worksheets.

Agency staff, project sponsors and their consultants, and discretionary grantees and applicants are encouraged to enroll.

For more grantee technical assistance, visit FRA’s Training & Guidance page. If you would like to be added to FRA’s mailing list to learn about future trainings and events, please contact us at FRARailProgramDelivery@dot.gov.

Click here for a listing of industry events. Changes due to COVID-19 restrictions will be noted as information becomes available.