ASLRRA Comments on Passage of Moving Forward Act

Today the House passed H.R. 2, the Moving Forward Act. It is a $1.5 trillion infrastructure bill that touches on a number of issues related to topics such as railroads, school facilities and the environment. In response, ASLRRA explained the bill’s positive provisions in the surface transportation portion, and others that the Association considers more problematic.

“As we said when the transportation portion of this bill passed out of committee, there are some pieces of this legislation that would help short lines serve our thousands of shippers in small towns and communities throughout the country, but unfortunately there are still numerous provisions that would hinder our ability to do that,” said Chuck Baker, President of ASLRRA “However, we understand that this is just a step in a lengthy process which will include more opportunities for stakeholder input and bipartisan agreement before the bill becomes public law.”

Positive elements for short line railroads in the Moving Forward Act include significantly increased funding for the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure Safety Improvements (CRISI) program, which helps pay for track infrastructure improvements. The bill also supports state freight investments through the National Highway Freight Program and authorizes funding for short line safety culture assessments and trainings provided by the Short Line Safety Institute. There are also no broad changes to current truck size and weights standards on national highways.

Problematic provisions in the bill include changing the Infrastructure for Rebuilding America (INFRA) grants to a Projects of National and Regional Significance (PNRS) program that would discontinue aspects of the program that allow short line railroads to participate. ASLRRA is also wary of a requirement for Surface Transportation Board (STB) mediation for commuter rail requests for track and rights of way access and implementation of a mandate regarding blocked crossings that would reduce rail network efficiency.

More Companies Join as Platinum Sponsors of This Year’s Connections Convention

October will be here soon, and with it ASLRRA’s virtual 2020 Connections Convention. The Association is grateful to have the support of its generous sponsors, who are helping bring top-notch educational opportunities to those in the short line industry.

ASLRRA extends a sincere thanks to the eight companies who have recently signed on as platinum sponsors of this year’s convention, which will take place Oct. 5-9 in an online format. They are:

Cummins
L.B. Foster Co.
Lincoln Transportation Insurance Brokers, Inc.
National Railroad Safety Services
PS Technology
ASLRRA, AAR Petition FRA for Permanent Rulemakings

On June 30, ASLRRA and the Association of American Railroads (AAR) submitted a petition for rulemaking on behalf of their members to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), based on Executive Order No. 13924 (EO 13924) regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

The petition calls for permanence of three regulations that have been or are currently waived. Doing so would align with EO 13924, which called for regulatory agencies to assess regulatory requirements that have been “temporarily rescinded, suspended, modified or waived during COVID-19” to determine if making such changes permanent would promote economic recovery.

The first request is for the FRA to allow railroads to use “quick tie-up” provisions in 49 C.F.R. Part 228 more regularly, allowing use of a verbal quick tie-up for certain employees in limited circumstances. Doing so would increase efficiency and benefit employees, who would not have to re-enter a terminal facility after an on-duty period to complete tie-up procedures.

Second, ASLRRA and AAR call for the FRA to permanently allow a designated supervisor of locomotive engineers (DSLE) to use a locomotive event recorder download to conduct recertification assessments of locomotive engineers. Such a change would result in significant resource savings for railroads.

Lastly, both associations want the FRA to allow web-based simulation training as a substitute for certain current “hands-on” training requirements as detailed in 49 C.F.R. § 232.203, which would allow for a more controlled training environment and individualized instruction.
HAPPY 4th! ASLRRA’s offices will be closed on Friday, July 3.

ASLRRA Member IAIS Uses CRISI Grant to Replace Antique Bridge in Iowa

To further tell the short line story, ASLRRA profiles some of the movers and shakers in the railroad industry.

ASLRRA member Iowa Interstate Railroad (IAIS) opened its new William J. Duggan Bridge on June 30, a “state-of-the-art structure” that will allow freight rail traffic to cross the Raccoon River in Booneville, Iowa.

The bridge replaces a 119-year-old through truss bridge, and is 661 ½ feet long. It can support modern 286,000-pound freight rail cars traveling up to 40 miles per hour, without any dimensional load limitations.

Half of the project’s cost was paid for by a $3.5 million Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant, and the entire project was completed a mere 17 months from the date of the grant award.

The bridge is named for William J. (Bill) Duggan, who joined Iowa Interstate in 1989. Prior to Duggan’s hiring the route was almost liquidated because it was considered unnecessary, with parts of the railroad kept idle until 1985. From 1989 to 1999 Duggan was the vice president of engineering, then known as vice president of operations. Since 1999 he has been vice president of operations at Railroad Development Corporation, the parent company of IAIS.

HDR, Inc., an ASLRRA supplier member, led the project engineering aspect of the bridge’s construction.
ASLRRA Webinars

Access Our On-Demand Webinars for Help with FRA Regulations

ASLRRA can help railroads understand federal regulations with its recorded webinars. Featured titles include:

- FRA Regulatory & Program Requirements for Short Lines, Pt. 1
- FRA Regulatory & Program Requirements for Short Lines, Pt. 2
- FRA Penalties and Violations
- Emergency Docket Waivers

Recordings of all four webinars are available on-demand through ASLRRA’s On-Demand Webinar library. On-demand webinars are free to ASLRRA members and available by paid subscription to non-members. In addition to these webinars, users can access over 100 other recordings covering a wide variety of topics, from human resources and communications to retirement benefits and legal issues. Follow the link above to browse ASLRRA’s offerings today.

Upcoming Webinars

Best Practices for Qualification Tracking and Assessments - July 16, 2020

Ashok Madhavan, senior railroad consultant at CloudMoyo, will talk about how to help ensure safe and compliant railroad operations through a comprehensive, digital qualification tracking system. This webinar will also feature a question and answer segment with Jeff Black and Mike Prince of the Terminal Railroad Association of St. Louis (TRRA), who will talk about how they use a qualification tracking system at TRRA. This webinar is free for ASLRRA members.

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.