NTSB Releases Transportation Fatality Report for 2016

Short line railroads should be very proud of surpassing the 365-day mark of fatality-free operations on November 6, 2017, particularly in light of the data released this week by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB). The 2016 fatality statistics show that rail (including freight, passenger and commuter) remains far safer than highway travel.

Of the 660 fatalities on freight, passenger and commuter rail, 74% were attributable to trespassing on rail property. For more on the report, and NTSB Chairman Robert Sumwalt's commentary, click here.

ASLarra is Accepting Submissions for 2018 Marketing Awards

ASLARRA is now accepting submissions for the 2018 Marketing Awards competition. The entry deadline is Friday, December 15, 2017. Don't miss the chance for your railroad to compete for this prestigious honor and join the distinguished circle of prior winners!

ASLARRA's Marketing Awards competition recognizes Class II and III railroads that have implemented the most innovative and successful marketing and customer service initiatives in the short line railroad industry, as determined by a panel of industry experts. Please visit our website to view the requirements and submit your entry!

Please contact Cara Boyle at cboyle@aslrra.org for more information.

Legislative Update

BRACE Act Still Most Co-Sponsored Tax Legislation, Tax Reform Efforts Underway

With the effort to produce tax reform legislation in Congress underway, ASLARRA continues to promote the 45G short line railroad rehabilitation tax credit, which supports critical infrastructure maintenance and improvements.

There is stand-alone legislation in both the House (H.R.721) and the Senate (S.407) to make the credit permanent, and those pieces of legislation have received significant support, with 250 co-sponsors in the House and 55 in the Senate. It is the most heavily co-sponsored piece of tax legislation in this session of Congress.
The credit was not extended in the initial versions of the House or Senate tax reform bills. However, the bill’s champions in Congress continue to show strong support for 45G, helping us find a way forward after Thanksgiving. Supporters are advocating for the bill’s inclusion in the House and Senate tax bills as they wind their way through the legislative process, or in a separate legislative vehicle. ASLRA is working to support their efforts in any way possible, and the Legislative Policy Committee is fully activated.

The short line railroad tax credit leverages private sector investment in rail infrastructure by providing a tax credit of 50 cents for every dollar spent on track improvements, capped at $3,500 per track mile. If extended, this credit will provide more clarity for ASLRA’s small business members so that they can plan and budget for track, grade crossing and bridge work in 2018 and beyond.

For support in reaching out to your elected representatives, please contact our Washington team’s Fred Oelsner. Also, please visit www.aslra.org/BRACE to learn more about this important tax and infrastructure legislation.

Follow @ASLRA on Twitter!

Regulatory Update

Medicare Part B Premiums for 2018 Announced

Standard monthly Part B premiums will stay the same in 2018, according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. While the premium will remain $134, some beneficiaries will pay slightly less.

For current enrollees, an increase in premiums cannot exceed the amount of cost-of-living adjustments for social security - or railroad retirement tier 1 - benefits. Since the 2018 adjustment is 2 percent, while roughly one fourth of Medicare beneficiaries will see an increase in their Part B premiums, they will not pay more than $134.

New enrollees will be subject to the standard premium amount, while others will still pay higher premiums due to their modified adjusted gross income.

To view a table showing income-related Part B premium adjustments for 2018, or to read more about this announcement, please read the Railroad Retirement Board’s press release here.

AASHTO Releases Mitigation Strategy Update

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) released its brochure meant to encourage railroads and departments of transportation (DOTs) to work together on infrastructure projects. The brochure explains the Railroad-DOT Mitigation Strategies, otherwise known as R16, which are a product of the second Strategic Highway Research Program (SHRP2).

In addition, AASHTO has updated its SHRP2 R16 website, which offers a variety of materials including model agreements, sample contracts and training materials, to help DOTs and railroads identify and resolve possible sources of conflict regarding highway projects.

The website also includes all available presentations from the 2017 Peer Exchange held Oct. 3-4 in Chicago.
Batory is Chao’s New Rail Adviser

Ron Batory has been named a rail adviser to U.S. Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, according to Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) spokesman Marc Willis.

Batory, who was formerly president and chief operating officer of Conrail, was nominated earlier this year to be FRA administrator, but has yet to be confirmed by the Senate. He retired from his position at Conrail this past spring.

Member News

Magazine Highlights Role of Rail in Development of Central Pennsylvania

In its most recent issue, Business In Focus magazine profiled the Central Pennsylvania counties of Montour and Columbia, focusing on the economic development that has made the area a magnet for a variety of new businesses. In discussing that development, the magazine highlighted the presence of rail as one of the contributing factors to the area’s success.

Helping to make these counties a favorable location for business is their “outstanding rail system,” which includes ASLRAA member North Shore Railroad. The article points out North Shore’s important role in shipping products and equipment to and from businesses in Montour and Columbia.

In addition to helping other businesses, the railroad itself has created many jobs, ultimately adding to the area’s appeal. North Shore Railroad has served Central Pennsylvania for over 35 years, winning many awards for its performance and service.

Florida East Coast Railway Showcases LNG Operations

At its annual Natural Gas for High Horsepower summit, held in Jacksonville, Fla. on Nov. 6-9, the Florida East Coast Railway (FEC) gave a tour of its liquid natural gas (LNG) operations to representatives of various industries from around the world.

On the Nov. 9 tour, which was the first since the recent completion of the LNG conversion project, guests viewed several demonstration stations. These included an LNG-powered locomotive and tender car, an LNG fueling station for railcars, an ISO container for transporting LNG, and an LNG-powered truck that hauls LNG tanker delivery trailers.

Each station also featured experts from FEC who answered attendees’ questions about LNG and its application. FEC is the first North American railroad whose entire mainline fleet operates on LNG.

Representatives on the tour came from as far away as Colombia, Korea and Japan, and represented such industries as rail, mining and power generation operations.

New York New Jersey Rail Receives First of Two Rail Barges
New York New Jersey Rail, LLC (NYNJR) launched the first of two newbuild rail barges in early November, a 370 foot by 59 foot by 14 foot car float made by Metal Trades, Inc.

The barge can carry up to 18 rail cars with a maximum load of 2,298 long tons of cargo, shuttling between the Greenville Yard in Jersey City, N.J. and the 65th Street Yard in Brooklyn, N.Y.

The new barges mark a move by the Port Authority to restore cross-harbor rail and container barge movements. By revitalizing rail, the Port Authority hopes to reduce truck traffic and air pollution in areas near the ports. Using barges to move cargo across the harbor takes dozens of tractor trailer loads off of regional highways.

**Strato Receives New Certification**

Strato, Inc. announced that its Quality Management System has received ISO 9001:2015 certification, which replaces its previous 9001:2008 certification.

“Certification to the new ISO standard one year earlier than required ultimately helps us better satisfy and exceed the needs of our customers,” said Strato President and CEO Mike Foxx in a press release.

Meeting new ISO requirements demonstrates Strato’s commitment to meeting the latest quality standards, which emphasizes thoroughly evaluating processes to ensure quality aligns with overall business strategies.

**Pioneer Railcorp Announces Annual Dividend**

In a Nov. 10 press release, Pioneer Railcorp’s Board of Directors announced a 10 cent dividend to its stockholders of record Nov. 28, 2017. The dividend will be payable Nov. 30.

As a short line railroad holding company with 23 railroad operations, Pioneer Railcorp manages over 600 miles of track in 12 states.

**Railway Supply Institute Introduces New President**

Mike O’Malley will succeed Tom Simpson as president of the Railway Supply Institute (RSI), effective Feb. 1, 2018. Simpson, who has been RSI president since 2010, is retiring.

“Tom is to be commended on his leadership in the rail industry, his years of public service, and his collaboration and friendship with ASLRR, and me personally,” said Linda Bauer Darr, president of ASLRR. “We wish Tom well, and look forward to working with Mr. O’Malley.”

Click here to read the full press release.

**Services Held for Railquip President Schroeder**

A memorial service was held Nov. 4 for Railquip, Inc. founder and president Helmut Schroeder, who passed away on Oct. 30. He was 78.

Schroeder, who was born in Germany, moved to the United States in 1966 to take on the role of vice president of sales for Hoesch Manufacturing. He formed Railquip in 1983 after becoming North America’s sole distributor of the Hoesch re-railing system. Railquip’s primary business is providing maintenance and maintenance of way equipment and supplies for maintenance shops and railroad industries.

Schroeder and his company were active members in ASLRR, and supported our publication and events.

Schroeder is survived by his wife Pamela, son Louie, daughter Helga, and sister Irmgard.

Save the Date for Railroad Day 2018
Railroad Day is March 7, 2018! Take advantage of the chance to make your voice heard and advocate for those issues that matter to the railroad industry.

ASLRRA Webinars

Please view and register for ASLRRA’s webinars by clicking here.

Webinar Save the Date: Section 130 Program Offered by FRA and FHWA

Mark your calendars for Jan. 25, 2018, when the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) will host a free webinar discussing the Railway-Highway Crossings Program, also known as the Section 130 Program. The discussion will look at the program from a state’s perspective, regarding both funding and implementation. In anticipation of the webinar, participants are invited to review a copy of Title 23, United States Code, as well as the FHWA’s page discussing the Section 130 program, and the FRA’s Highway-Rail Crossing and Trespass Prevention website. Registration information will be available soon.

ASLRRA Offers On-Demand Webinars

ASLRRA’s expanded educational offerings now include On-Demand Webinars! ASLRRA webinars already provide flexible training to meet busy schedules; now members can access valuable educational content at their convenience. Webinars cover a broad range of topics, including Regulatory Updates, Veteran Recruitment, Finance for Railroads, Social Media, Protecting Roadway Workers, and much more.Visit our website to view a complete list of On-Demand Webinars, presentations and takeaway materials.

Views and News is published by the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association. Please contact Amy Krouse, Editor, akrouse@aslrra.org, with member news, questions or comments.