



February 17, 2021



ASLRRRA Releases Annual Report Highlighting Work During COVID

ASLRRRA has released its [2020 annual report](#), focusing in large part on how the industry has worked through the COVID-19 pandemic the Association provided support to its members.

The report looks at ASLRRRA's legislative accomplishments, particularly achieving permanence for the 45G short line tax credit. The Association also worked hard to advocate for small-business interests in COVID-19 relief legislation, and continued its efforts in more conventional areas, such as ensuring funding for grant programs vital to short line railroads.

Also discussed was the way ASLRRRA's staff promotes industry interests, such as by representing short lines on various Federal Railroad Administration committees or serving in leadership positions with related organizations such as Operation Lifesaver.

ASLRRRA also supported its members by offering a variety of online resources, as COVID-19 restrictions greatly limited in-person gatherings. The virtual Connections convention drew nearly 600 participants, while the virtual General Counsel Symposium had a record-breaking 82 attendees. The association hosted 36 live webinars in 2020, a 50 percent increase over the previous year.

The Association created a new standing committee in 2020. The Environmental Committee, chaired by Watco's Assistant Vice President of Environmental Sean Strong and supported by ASLRRRA staff liaison Jo Strang, will focus on environmental issues. In particular, the committee will monitor developments in federal environmental laws and regulations as they pertain to railroads; provide members with guidance on environmental compliance issues; and work to inform stakeholders and lawmakers about the ways short lines and suppliers are working to lower their environmental impact.

A brief overview of the Short Line Safety Institute (SLSI) concluded the report, with a summary of efforts to help railroads improve safety culture, and information about the various training events conducted in 2020.

Coalition Health Plan Offers a Program Specifically Designed for ASLRRRA Member Needs

ASLRRRA has partnered with HUB International to form a [Coalition Health Plan](#), specifically designed for ASLRRRA members seeking to reduce their medical premiums and simplify the healthcare experience for employees.

As the 5th largest broker in the world with over 500 locations in North America, HUB International is well equipped to provide ASLRRRA members with a vast network of benefits experts and best-in-class resources no matter where they are in the US. Member companies can expect more control of costs in

February 17, 2021

comparison to traditional insurance carriers and wide access to hospitals and doctors thanks to utilization of the Aetna national preferred provider organization (PPO) network - the largest national PPO network with strong access to providers in all 50 states. Plan participants also benefit from reduced volatility of year-to-year premium increases, due to a highly efficient funding structure.

Watch a [recording of our February 16 webinar](#) where HUB International's Jeff Wiperman and Mark Avery provided a detailed plan overview and answered audience questions, and visit the [Coalition Health Plan landing page](#) for additional details and provider contact information.



ASLRRA, AAR and CSLRA Submit Comments to California Board

ASLRRA joined the Association of American Railroads (AAR) and the California Short Line Railroad Association (CSLRA) in submitting [comments](#) to the California Air Resources Board regarding an Oct 27, 2020 Notice of Preparation of a Draft Substitute Environmental Document (NOP) for its proposed In-Use Locomotive Regulation.

The comments note issues with many aspects of the NOP, including assessment of environmental and economic impact of each of the proposed changes, and the range of reasonable and feasible alternatives presented, as required by California's Environmental Quality Act. Follow the link above to read the full document.

ASLRRA Submits Comments on FRA's Proposed Rule on PTC System RFAs

ASLRRA and the Association of American Railroads (AAR) submitted [comments](#) in response to the Federal Railroad Administration's (FRA) [notice of proposed rulemaking](#) to revise regulations governing changes to positive train control (PTC) systems and reporting on system functioning.

The associations generally support the proposal to streamline existing provisions governing the Request for Amendment process and improve existing annual reporting requirements. There were, however, some changes suggested.

ASLRRA and AAR's recommendations include that the FRA include a fourth option of summary approval of an RFA after 45 days, eliminate chief operating officer (COO) verification of technical requirements, change the requirements of biannual and annual failure reports and more.

New York State DOT Accepting Applications for Rail and Port Project Grants

The New York State Department of Transportation is [making \\$87 million available](#) for rail and port project funding through the Passenger and Freight Rail Assistance Program and Railway-Highway Grade Crossing Program.

Eligible projects include track and bridge rehabilitation, terminal and siding construction, dock and bulkhead construction, crossing resurfacing, dredging and more.

Applications are due April 22. Find full program guidelines and application instructions [here](#), and other information, such as frequently asked questions and a benefit cost analysis tool, [here](#).

In order to assist members applying for various grant programs, ASLRRRA's Member Discount Program features preferred providers who provide grant-writing services at competitive pricing. Log in to the [ASLRRRA site](#) to learn more.

ASLRRRA Members Receive Grant Funding from New Jersey DOT

The New Jersey Department of Transportation has [announced recipients](#) of \$29 million in grants from the Rail Freight Assistance Program. Ten projects were funded, including five belonging to ASLRRRA members: Conrail, New York, Susquehanna and Western Railway, Belvidere and Delaware River Railway and Dover and Rockaway River Railroad.

Conrail will receive a little over \$9 million to replace Point-No-Point Bridge. The New York, Susquehanna and Western Railway was awarded funding worth \$3.5 million total for two separate projects, while Belvidere and Delaware received \$673,828 and Dover and Rockaway will benefit from a \$1.8 million grant awarded to Morris County for a rail realignment project.

Railroad Retirement Board Names New Director of Human Resources

The Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) has [appointed](#) Nancy Blitzer as its director of human resources. She previously served as the agency's chief of human services and labor relations.


In her new role, Blitzer will administer the RRB's training and development programs for agency employees, as well as manage staffing, recruitment, workforce planning, employee relations and more.

New RAN Cyber Advisory Concerning a Windows Vulnerability Issued

A new Railway Alert Network (RAN) Cyber Advisory from the Association of American Railroads (AAR) is now available for viewing by ASLRRRA members on ASLRRRA's [website](#).

The advisory discusses a Feb. 9 "Patch Tuesday" release made by Microsoft, alerting users of Microsoft Win32k to a vulnerability that could allow hackers to take control of a Windows Operating System with administrator-level permissions.

The Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) also issued a related [notice](#) advising users and administrators to review Microsoft's [advisory](#) and apply necessary patches to their servers.



PTC Products & Services

Visit aslrro.org/PTC for information about vetted providers who can assist short lines in lowering costs, accelerating implementation, and increasing interoperability between host and tenant railroads.



Railroad Subcommittee Chairman Payne Meets Virtually with ASLRRRA Staff and Member Representatives

Representatives from ASLRRRA-member railroads joined members of the Association's legislative team in a Zoom meeting with Representative Donald Payne, Jr. (D - N.J.), the chairman of the House Transportation Committee's Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials.

The meeting focused on short line railroads' response to the COVID-19 pandemic and their hopes for economic recovery. Participants also talked with Payne about the environmental benefits of rail and short line priorities for future transportation reauthorization bills.

Participants in the meeting included New York Susquehanna and Western Railroad President Nathan Fenno, Conrail Deputy Corporate Secretary and Corporate Compliance Officer Elizabeth Barnhart, Conrail Chief Engineer - Design and Construction Ryan Hill, and SMS Rail Service Director of Business Development John McCreavy, who is also president of the New Jersey Railroad Association.

Representing ASLRRRA were the Association's Assistant Vice President of Legislative and Regulatory Policy Crystal Gitchell and Vice President of Government Affairs Tom Lynch.

"Chairman Payne and his staff heard from railroads regarding the business challenges short lines face, the economic impact of rail service in their communities, and the innovative ways they are using technology to drive improvements in safety and reduce environmental impact. These direct conversations allow for better decisions from the committees of jurisdiction and help to avoid unintended consequences of lawmaking," said Tom Lynch, Vice President of Government Affairs, ASLRRRA.

Rail Leaders Discuss Legislative Prospects in a Biden Administration

A recent [article](#) on *Progressive Railroading* magazine's website looks at how legislative issues could be addressed by the Biden Administration and a new Congress, with rail advocates cautiously optimistic about the prospects for the industry's agenda.

ASLRRRA President Chuck Baker contributed his thoughts, expressing hope for the passage of a much-needed infrastructure bill. Baker also discussed the 45G short line tax credit, which was recently made permanent, and other concerns ASLRRRA will pursue now, such as ensuring federal grant programs continue to provide support for small railroads.

The article also explored how the Biden administration's focus on climate change could benefit the rail industry, and how it might not. There was also input from rail suppliers, including Nicole Brewin of the Railway Supply Institute and Ashley Wieland of the National Railroad Construction and Maintenance Association, who spoke to the legislative efforts important to the supplier side of the rail industry.

ASLRRA New Members

Know a company that would benefit from joining and participating in ASLRRA? Please contact ASLRRA's Vice President of Membership and Business Development [Kathy Keeney](#) via email or on (202) 585-3439.

ASLRRA is Pleased to Welcome Two New Members to Its Membership Rolls



[Christensen Bridge & Rail Services](#), based in Houston, Texas, joins as a supplier member. The company provides rail bridge construction and maintenance, rail construction and maintenance, logistics hub design and build as well as rail transload equipment design and build services.

The firm brings a collaborative, integrated approach to delivering bridge and rail projects by implementing industry best practices with a Safety First approach to all it does. Our primary contact is [David Friesen](#), Vice President of Operations, who can be reached on (830) 928-1674. Many thanks to [Lone Star Railroad Contractors](#) for recommending they join ASLRRA.



[City of Tulsa - Rogers County Port Authority](#), based in Catoosa, Okla., joins as a switching member. It operates over 17 miles of track and connects with BNSF Railway and South Kansas & Oklahoma Railroad. Commodities hauled include aggregates, automotive, chemicals, ethanol, forest products, steel & scrap and intermodal.

Deputy Port Director [Daniel Grisham](#) is our primary contact and can be reached on (918) 266-2291. Many thanks to Josh Putterman from [Bluejay Advisors](#) for the assist with this membership.

ASLRRRA SAFETY & TRAINING
**Reasonable Suspicion Drug & Alcohol Signs
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ASLRRRA Announcements

Be on the Lookout for Membership Invoices Emailed to Company Contacts

ASLRRRA 2021 membership dues invoices were emailed to the main billing contact at all member companies from accountsreceivable@aslrrra.org last week. The Association thanks all those who have already paid.

If possible, consider paying via ACH. Due to delays in the postal service and our remote working operations at ASLRRRA headquarters there may be a delay in processing of checks.

If you choose to pay by ACH/wire, please provide as much detail as possible in the transaction notes, including invoice number, or in the remittance advice emailed to accounting@aslrrra.org. As always, dues payments to ASLRRRA are deductible as a regular business expense except for the portion of annual dues attributable to lobbying activities - that portion for 2021 is 15 percent.

If you haven't received your invoice and believe you should be the main billing contact, please check your spam filter or reach out to us at the email above requesting that a copy of your invoice be directed to you.

Complete Accident/Incident Reports by Feb. 28 to be Eligible for ASLRRRA Safety Awards

Only 11 days are left to complete Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) accident/incident reports for 2020 and be eligible for ASLRRRA's President's and Jake Awards.

Railroad and switching members must complete the required FRA accident/incident reports for every month of 2020 to be eligible for the awards. Any reports submitted after Feb. 28 will not be considered.

For more information, please see visit our [safety awards page](#) or contact ASLRRRA's [Fred Oelsner](#).

ASLRRRA's Annual Industry Awards Recognize Deserving Companies and Employees – Nominate Them Today

Less than a month is left to submit nominations for ASLRRRA's industry awards, including the [Business Development Award](#), [Veterans Engagement Award](#), and [Safety Person of the Year](#) and [Safety Professional of the Year Awards](#).

February 17, 2021

Follow each link to learn about last year's honorees, read award criteria and find out how to submit a nomination. Nominations for all awards are due March 5.

ASLRRA Out and About

Gelnar Attends Virtual SOFA Working Group Meeting

ASLRRA's Vice President of Safety and Compliance JR Gelnar participated in a Feb. 10 virtual meeting of the Switching Operations Fatalities Analysis (SOFA) working group to review a recent fatality and finalize an upcoming alert.

With the ongoing pandemic, the working group will meet more often through a virtual platform to continue the review of past switching fatalities and create alerts. Gelnar represents short lines at SOFA meetings.

Listen to Chuck Baker's Take on Short Lines in 2021 in a Railfanning Interview

ASLRRA President Chuck Baker spoke with Railfanning.org's Todd DeFeo about short lines in a Feb. 11 [podcast](#).

Baker provided an overview of short line and regional railroads and the role they play in the national rail network. He also provided a 2021 outlook for the short line industry and talked about how short lines have managed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

ASLRRA Industry Award Nominations Open!



Nominations being accepted for 2021 Safety Person, Safety Professional, Business Development, and Veterans Engagement Awards. **Nominations due by March 5!** *Click to learn more...*



ASLRRA Webinars – Live or On-Demand

Upcoming Webinars

[Q&A Session with NTSB Investigative Team: Granite Canyon, WY](#) - February 25, 2021

Please join representatives from the NTSB Investigative Team to discuss the Granite Canyon, WY Accident that took place on October 4, 2018. On October 4, 2018, at 7:40 p.m. local time, eastbound Union Pacific Railroad freight train MGRCY04 (striking train) collided with the rear of stationary Union Pacific Railroad freight train MPCNP03 (stationary train) after cresting a hill and descending a grade for about 13 miles.

[Part 240/242: Harmonization of Certification](#) - March 10, 2021

The Federal Railroad Administration's Kevin Lewis discusses the FRA's work on revising its regulation governing the qualification and certification of locomotive engineers to make it consistent with its regulation for the qualification and certification of conductors. At the end of the presentation, Lewis will be joined by ASLRRA's JR Gelnar to help field audience questions. Registration is free for ASLRRA members.

[Part 225 Back to Basics, Part 3: Highway-Rail Grade Crossing](#) - March 11, 2021

In the last of this three-part series, representatives from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) will discuss Reporting/Recordkeeping Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Accident/Incidents - FRA F 6180.57 & FRA F 6180.150.

Sponsored by:



[Rail Trends: Freight Railroads Helping America Recover](#) - March 16, 2021

Association of American Railroads (AAR) Assistant Vice President Luisa Fernandez Willey will discuss the current state of the railroad industry, the movement of key commodities, and leading economic indicators crucial in understanding the economic recovery. This webinar is scheduled for 90 minutes to allow for more questions at the end of the presentation.

Improve Understanding of FRA Training Rules Through ASLRRA's On-Demand Webinars

Helping railroad members understand and comply with federal regulations is important to ASLRRA, and webinars are a crucial tool in conveying this valuable information. To enable as many people as possible to utilize these resources, the Association also makes webinar recordings available online in ASLRRA's [On-Demand Webinar library](#).

A recent series concerning Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Part 243, featuring FRA representatives discussing training and compliance requirements, is available online. The three-part series includes:

- FRA Part 243: Part 1 - Initial Training Requirements
- FRA Part 243: Part 2 - Requirements for Compliance

- FRA Part 243: Part 3 - Discussion and Q&A (Available starting Feb. 18)

In addition, ASLRRRA offers more than 100 recordings covering a variety of railroad topics. Recordings are free to members and available by subscription to non-members. Follow the link above to learn more.

[Click here](#) for more ASLRRRA events.

Industry Events and Announcements

University of Illinois Hay Seminar Discusses Analysis of Train Dispatching Data

The next University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Hay Seminar discusses rail dispatch analysis methods and their benefits.

William Barbour, a research scientist at Vanderbilt University, will lead the seminar, which is titled “Rail Dispatch Analysis Methods Using Optimization and Empirical Data.” It will be held Feb. 19. Registration is free but required for participants. Learn more at [this link](#).

Learn about Railroad Signal Systems and Rail Crossing Safety Through Two University of Wisconsin Courses

The University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Engineering Professional Development department will hold two rail-related online courses starting in March: the [“Fundamentals of Railway Train Control and Signaling”](#) and [“Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Safety.”](#)

The first course on train control consists of four sessions starting on March 2. It is an entry-level course that will provide participants a basic understanding of how signal systems are designed and operated.

The grade crossing course also comprises four sessions, starting March 29. Participants will learn the basic principles of highway-rail crossing safety and their application to new and existing projects.

Follow the individual links above for more information about each class and to enroll.

[Click here](#) for more industry events.

Views & News is published by American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association. Please contact [Amy Krouse](#), editor, with questions or comments.