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Infrastructure Bill Passes Senate, Sent to House, Turns Attention to Budget Resolution

The Senate voted Tuesday to pass the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). It will now go to the House, but whether and when the House will act on it depends on what actions the Senate takes regarding the budget reconciliation process.

As it stands, the Senate's proposal is excellent for short lines, and ASLRRRA issued a [statement](#) to that effect on Tuesday. There are multiple attractive funding opportunities, particularly through the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant program. The Senate also leaves out troubling policy provisions, like a crew-size mandate and blocked crossings fines.

The Senate also completed debate on a larger \$3.5 trillion budget resolution, and individual Senate committees are now tasked with filling out the details of the budget package in the coming weeks before the Senate votes again - likely in September or October but by then it will be a more specific, detailed bill and include much more fleshed out policy.

The House has indicated an unwillingness to consider the IIJA without this broader budget bill that addresses other Democratic priorities like social welfare, with support for child care, paid family leave and pre-kindergarten education. Senate Democrats plan to use the budget reconciliation process to circumvent Republican opposition to the budget resolution.

There is no telling whether the House will try to change the Senate's infrastructure bill before sending it to the president's desk, as House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) would prefer, or whether the House will simply pass the bill as-is and then forward it to the President's desk for signature, which is what the Senate, many House moderates and the White House would prefer. ASLRRRA's legislative and government affairs team will be keeping tabs on the bill and its potential impact on the short line freight rail industry, and will continue working to preserve the many great elements of the bill.

ASLRRRA's 2021 Conference and Exhibition Begins to Take Shape

This year's Annual Conference will be held in person Nov. 17 to 19 in Phoenix, Ariz. With a strong lineup of speakers, more than 30 hours of industry-specific education, the opportunity to honor rail industry colleagues with ASLRRRA's Industry Awards presentation, more than 200 industry suppliers to learn from, and plenty of time for golf and meeting with other railroaders, this is the event you won't want to miss this fall.

Registration will be opening along with hotel blocks by the end of the month. A conference schedule can be viewed [here](#). Please look out for communication on Committee Meeting details from your ASLRRRA Committee Chairs, or Staff Liaisons.

Reminder: Please do not book hotels through an e-mail solicitation or phone call from a third-party provider. ASLRRRA contracts directly with the hotels on behalf of the conference. Only book hotels using links provided in an e-mail from @aslrra.org.



North Carolina DOT Grant Funds Awarded to ASLRRRA Members

ASLRRRA members comprise all of the 12 short line railroads [receiving grants](#) from the North Carolina Department of Transportation's Freight Rail and Rail Crossing Safety Improvement program (FRRCSI).

The program awarded approximately \$10.2 million in matching grant funds for rail infrastructure improvement projects. The North Carolina Ports Authority also received grant funding for two projects

at the Port of Wilmington.

Click the link above to view descriptions of each railroad's project and grant amount. Congratulations to all those members receiving grants:

- Aberdeen and Rockfish Railroad Company
- Alexander Railroad Company
- Atlantic and Western Railway
- Blue Ridge Southern Railroad
- Carolina Coastal Railway
- Chesapeake & Albemarle Railroad
- Great Smoky Mountains Railroad
- Laurinburg and Southern Railroad
- North Carolina and Virginia Railroad
- RJ Corman Railroad Company
- Wilmington Terminal Railroad
- Yadkin Valley Railroad

RAN Message Concerning CDC's Face-Mask Guidance Available on ASLRRRA's Website

ASLRRRA has posted on its website an Association of American Railroads (AAR) Railway Alert Network (RAN) Situational Awareness Message concerning wearing facial coverings indoors. Members are able to log in and view the message [here](#).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued revised guidance on wearing face coverings indoors due to a significant rise in COVID-19 infections nationwide, caused in large part by the highly contagious delta variant. The CDC recommends all people, including those fully vaccinated against COVID-19, wear a mask in public indoor settings in areas of substantial or high disease transmission.

The CDC's [website](#) features a map indicating transmission status in each state, according to county or parish. Information is also included for Washington, D.C. and Puerto Rico.



ASLRRRA Statement Supports the IJJA, Encourages Swift Action

ASLRRRA has [issued a statement](#) in response to yesterday's Senate vote passing the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

"Today's Senate passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IJJA) is the culmination of many months of measured consideration and bipartisan work to provide a certain path forward on improving infrastructure, ensuring economic recovery and U.S. supply chain competitiveness. The IJJA recognizes small business

freight railroads as an integral and essential piece of the freight rail network, helping to move America forward by serving tens of thousands of shippers and supporting the small town, rural and urban communities in which they operate while minimizing greenhouse gas emissions and reducing wear and tear on the nation's roads. This measure marks unprecedented levels of investment in programs that are critical to our freight industry - like CRISI, RAISE, and INFRA - providing our members enormously expanded opportunities to compete for investment grants to implement new technology, upgrade aging track, rehabilitate bridges, and initiate important safety measures that allow us to better serve our customers. We commend the Senate for advancing this bold, bipartisan bill - and for avoiding needless policy mandates that would hinder our ability to serve the industries that rely on us. We now urge the U.S. House of Representatives to work to swiftly move this legislation to the President's desk," said ASLRRRA President Chuck Baker.



DISASTER PREPAREDNESS RESOURCES

Be Prepared! Download ASLRRRA's member-exclusive templates and checklists to build or enhance your railroad's emergency response plans. Visit www.aslrra.org/disasterprep.

ASLRRRA Announcements

Member Discount Program Offers Products and Services at Preferred Pricing

The money saved using [ASLRRRA's Member Discount Program](#) Preferred Providers could pay your annual dues and then some. ASLRRRA's Member Discount Program leverages the buying power of all association members to secure discounted pricing on essential business products and services.

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ASLRRRA members, regardless of size or individual purchasing power, receive exclusive access to programs tailored specifically for the short line railroad industry, as well as discount pricing, special offers, and guaranteed exceptional service. Whether your railroad operates five miles of track or 50, you can save thousands of dollars a year on products and services you already use.

From railroad tie inspections and payment processing to grant writing and PTC products and services, ASLRRRA's Discount Program Partners have you covered. Visit www.aslrra.org/discounts for details and start saving today!

Use ASLRRRA's Disaster Preparedness Resources to Get Ready for Potential Adverse Events

Hurricane season is underway, and wildfires continue to burn across the western United States. These disasters and others can all cause widespread damage to the national rail network, wreaking havoc and disrupting normal business operations for weeks and even months. The potential human, community and economic impact underscores the critical need for railroads to have an emergency plan that can be activated on short notice as well as quick access to resources and emergency relief services to facilitate a return to normal operations as quickly as possible.

With support from railroad and supplier members, ASLRRRA has assembled essential templates and checklists to assist members in developing response plans that can be put in place and used as training tools before disaster strikes, as well as emergency response tools and resources to aid in the recovery process in the aftermath of a catastrophic event.

Available resources include disaster planning, hazmat response, and instructions on accessing an emergency docket, in addition to links to other government websites, and members may download materials [directly from the website](#).

ASLRRRA also has a robust selection of recorded webinars available for members in its [On-Demand Webinar](#) library that may be used to prepare and train for emergency situations. Topics range from crisis communications and media training to hazardous materials incident reporting and an emergency notifications section review.

Apply for Railroad of the Year Competition, Winners will be Recognized at ASLRRRA Conference

Railway Age magazine is currently [accepting nominations](#) for its annual Short Line Railroad of the Year and Regional Railroad of the Year awards. This year's winners will be recognized at ASLRRRA's Annual Conference and Exposition Nov. 17 to 19 in Phoenix, Ariz. and be featured in the magazine's November issue.

All North American Class II and III railroads are eligible. The awards recognize railroads that demonstrate outstanding achievement in any of a number of areas, such as community relations, safety improvement, customer service, enhanced productivity, operational innovation and more.

Nominations are due Oct. 1. Follow the link above for more information, or [this link](#) to go directly to the nomination form.

ASLRRA Out and About

Gitchell, Radford Discuss Short Line Priorities with Staff for LA Representative

ASLRRA's Assistant Vice President of Legislative and Regulatory Policy Crystal Gitchell and Assistant Vice President of Congressional Affairs Zach Radford met with staff for Representative Troy Carter (D-La.) in Washington, D.C. last week to discuss the short line freight rail industry's key priorities as Congress advances infrastructure legislation.

Carter took office in May 2021 and earned seats on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, including the railroads subcommittee, and the Committee on Small Business. His district includes several short line railroads and ASLRRA is eager to host the newly elected congressman and his staff for some site visits in the future.

Baker's New Column Explains the Importance of CRISI Grants to Short Line Freight Rail

In his [column](#) in *Railway Age* magazine's August issue, ASLRRA President Chuck Baker hones in on federal railroad infrastructure grants, specifically the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program.

Baker explains that, from a short line perspective, CRISI grants are "the most important" of currently available federal programs. It is the only funding program for which short lines are directly eligible to apply, and Baker is encouraged by the CRISI funding provided in the Senate's Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

The column goes on to highlight four key ways CRISI funding is vital to small railroads and includes an example from ASLRRA member Iowa Interstate Railroad (IAIS), showing how IAIS used a \$3.47 million CRISI grant to help replace a 121-year-old bridge over which moves almost 8,000 carloads annually.

Save Money with ASLRRA's Member Discount Program Partners



The image displays a collection of logos for ASLRRA's Member Discount Program Partners. The logos are arranged in two rows. The top row includes: aE (a stylized 'a' and 'E' in a square), BERGMANN ARCHITECTS ENGINEERS PLANNERS (a square with a 'B' and the text below), Elavon | usbank (Elavon logo and the usbank logo), GTS (GTS text and a circular logo with horizontal lines), and HR (a stylized 'H' and 'R' logo). The bottom row includes: HUB (a blue circle with a white 'H' and the text HUB), LORAM (the word LORAM in red with a stylized train icon), McGRIFE, SEIBELS & WILLIAMS, INC. (a shield-shaped logo with a cross and the text below), and ORR Safety (a green cross logo with the text ORR Safety).



ASLRRRA Webinars – Live or On-Demand

Upcoming Webinars

[Hours of Service Pilot Program](#) - Aug. 18, 2021 (NOTE NEW DATE)

This webinar, open only to ASLRRRA members, is a discussion of the pilot program being developed by ASLRRRA, which would allow train employees to initiate on-duty periods between the hours of midnight and 6 am, on six consecutive days followed by 24 hours of rest before returning to work. ASLRRRA is seeking interested railroads to participate in a fatigue study approved by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). This informational webinar will help you to decide if this waiver is right for your railroad.

Three-Part Webinar Series on FRA Part 243 Available in On-Demand Webinar Library

Railroad safety & operations professionals can learn a great deal from ASLRRRA's three-part webinar series on Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Part 243, which can be found in ASLRRRA's [On-Demand Webinar](#) library. The series discusses training requirements and compliance, and is presented by ASLRRRA's JR Gelnar, as well as Mitch Harris of Rio Grande Pacific Corporation and Katie Inouye of Spark Training Solutions.

Look for the sessions featured below in the Regulatory category:

- 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

ASLRRRA's online resource library offers more than 150 webinar recordings on a variety of topics. Visit aslrra.org/webinars and select the On Demand Webinars button to view a complete list of all available recordings. Access is free to ASLRRRA members, and by subscription for non-members.

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

Industry Events and Announcements

SMART Seeks Operators Interested in California Short Line

Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART), an ASLRRRA member that operates passenger service, is exploring the option of contracting out a short line operation to a third party.

SMART recently received approval from the Surface Transportation Board to become a common carrier for freight and take over the existing operation from the Northwestern Pacific Railroad, a line that is discontinuing operations. In an effort to gauge potential interest in the freight rail operation, SMART issued a [Request for Information \(RFI\)](#), sharing details about the opportunity and requesting feedback. Interested firms should submit the questionnaire included in the RFI electronically using an

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online procurement portal here: <https://sonomamarintrain.bonfirehub.com/opportunities/49178> by 2:00 pm (Pacific time) on Aug. 18.

AREMA's Virtual Conference Scheduled for September, Communications and Signals Symposium is Next May

The American Railway Engineering and Maintenance-of-Way Association (AREMA) will hold its 2021 [Virtual Conference](#) Sept. 26 to 30. Discounted early-bird registration ends Aug. 26.

Another event, AREMA's [2022 Communications and Signals Symposium](#), will take place in person May 15 to 17, 2022, in Kansas City, Mo. Registration for the event is expected to open in early December 2021.

[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.