



April 27, 2022

**ASLRRRA is hosting its Annual Conference and Exhibition next week, so we will not publish Views & News on May 4. The next issue will be May 11. We'll see you in St. Louis!**

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## **ASLRRRA Welcomes New Preferred Provider Spark Training Solutions**

Spark Training Solutions is ASLRRRA's [newest Preferred Provider](#), offering affordable safety, regulatory, and compliance training solutions to Association members.

Spark Training Solutions helps railroads and contractors find the most effective strategies to manage their company, Part 219, and other DOT-regulated drug and alcohol testing programs. As a third-party program administrator combining industry-specific solutions, online tools, and key national partnerships, Spark Solutions provides an affordable program and services that allow ASLRRRA members' Designated Employer Representatives (DER) to focus on safety while avoiding unnecessary administrative tasks.

"We welcome Spark Training Solutions to our select group of Member Discount Partners -- they are a proven industry innovator with a solid record of providing exceptional safety and compliance services to short line railroads in support of Part 219 requirements," said ASLRRRA President Chuck Baker. "Our members, especially our smallest railroad members, will appreciate the option to participate in random testing pools and consortiums."

ASLRRRA member railroads and their contractors will benefit from the Spark team's industry-specific drug and alcohol testing expertise and hands-on support, discount pricing and expanded services, custom-built online tools, and an established national network of providers.

Attendees at ASLRRRA's Annual Conference and Exhibition may visit Spark Training Solutions in booth 708 to learn more about this new program.

For a complete list of ASLRRRA's Member Discount Program Preferred Providers, click [here](#).

For information on the benefits of joining ASLRRRA's Member Discount Program, contact [Sabrina Waiss](#), SVP, Education and Business Development.



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## The Conference Kicks Off on Sunday! Register Online Through Thursday or On-Site in St. Louis

ASLRRRA is excited to welcome over 1,200 rail industry professionals to St. Louis for the [Annual Conference and Exhibition](#). Even though the conference starts in only four days, interested participants can still register to join their colleagues for hours of educational sessions, numerous networking opportunities and other events.

[Online registration](#) closes tomorrow, but in-person registrations will be accepted onsite at the Registration Desk beginning at 12 noon on April 30, at the [America's Convention Center Complex](#). We have extended availability in ASLRRRA's hotel room block with discounted pricing at the [Hyatt Regency St. Louis](#). Shuttles will run continuously between this hotel and convention center while events are taking place.

Remember, individuals **must** be logged in to their ASLRRRA accounts prior to attempting to register. Those without an ASLRRRA user account should email [aslrra@aslrra.org](mailto:aslrra@aslrra.org) to create one, while organizations needing to register five or more employees at one time should send a list with employee names, titles and email addresses to ASLRRRA's Julie Duriga at [jduriga@aslrra.org](mailto:jduriga@aslrra.org).

## Expo Hall Happenings Include Big Equipment, Small Businesses, Cash Prizes, Refreshments and More

While in attendance at our ASLRRRA Annual Conference and Exhibition, make plans to visit the [205 Expo Hall booths](#), and especially the sold-out Green Zone area.

Many exhibitors are bringing in large equipment to display; others are planning technology demonstrations. Exhibitors range in size from some of the largest corporations to the smallest Mom-and-Pop types, and there are 30 first timers.

The Expo will be a hub for learning, networking and fun. Be sure to visit the Short Line Training Center Mobile Classroom, presented by ASLRRRA and Iowa Northern Railway Company. Look for other interesting booths and activities scattered around the hall, including rail bikes and even a special ping-pong table.

Those who enjoy an adult beverage should visit our Specialty Bar, featuring bourbons and microbrews. Non-drinker or tired from all your expo time? Visit our Specialty Coffee Bar. And be sure to ask exhibitors for a cash prize drawing ticket for your visit, giving you a chance to win up to \$1,000.

Finally, stop by the Headshot Lounge right outside the Expo Hall to have a free professional photo taken. Use the image on a company website, to update a LinkedIn profile and in other professional applications.



### **ASLRRA Staff Discusses Short Line Position on Reciprocal Switching with STB Members**

On April 18 and 21, ASLRRA President Chuck Baker, General Counsel and Senior Vice President-Law Sarah Yurasko and Senior Advisor Mike Ogborn had ex parte meetings with Surface Transportation Board (STB) members Martin Oberman, Robert Primus, Patrick Fuchs, Michelle Shultz and Karen Hedlund to discuss Docket No. EP 711 (Sub-No. 1), Reciprocal Switching, on behalf of ASLRRA.

ASLRRA summarized the points made in its April 4 supplemental comments in response to the line of questioning from Chairman Oberman and Fuchs during the STB's March 15 and 16 hearings. Questions included, "How much overall freight rail network traffic would excluding Class II and III short line traffic from the reciprocal switching rule represent?" ASLRRA said it had analyzed data and determined that a little over 10 percent of freight rail traffic that would otherwise be subject to the rule would be excluded if the STB determines to promulgate the proposed reciprocal switching rule with short line traffic excluded, using the clarifying language that ASLRRA has suggested.

Per transparency requirements, each of the meetings is summarized and made publicly available on the STB website in short order. In response to questions from the board members, there were various discussions about alternative ways to construct the rule so that short lines and their unique and fragile economics could remain protected, but at the same time shippers moving traffic on short lines could have access to the potential benefits of reciprocal switching if the short line in question agreed to the request.

There was also discussion about if the proposed rule would be more beneficial for shippers if traffic currently moving on short line railroads was still excluded as originally proposed but short lines were included as a possible new competing railroad.

Each of the board members indicated that they value short line railroads and the service that they provide to the network as a whole and stressed that the STB would like to avoid unintended consequences in any proceeding that could harm the short line segment.

### **Railroad Retirement Board Q&A Focuses on Buyouts**

A common question for Railroad Retirement Board (RRB) representatives is how taking a railroad employer buyout affects future eligibility for railroad retirement and unemployment benefits.

The RRB's [April Q&A](#) focuses on this subject, explaining that accepting a buyout does not necessarily exclude an employee from receiving a regular railroad retirement annuity when that employee reaches retirement age.

The Q&A further discusses issues like the current connection requirement and whether buyouts are subject to railroad retirement payroll taxes. Follow the link above for the complete article.

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## Mississippi Enacts State Rail Infrastructure Tax Credit for Short Lines

Mississippi has joined the growing number of states offering tax credits to Class II and III railroads. Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves signed House Bill 1108 into law on April 21.

The bill, which begins in the 2022 tax year and is currently authorized for the 2022 and 2023 calendar years, allows railroads to claim a state tax credit equal to 50 percent of their eligible track maintenance spend, capped at \$5,000 per track mile. Based on the estimated 1,600 Class II and III track miles in Mississippi, this creates

a potential \$8 million annual funding program. Like the federal 45G tax credit, this tax credit can be assigned to another Mississippi state income taxpayer.

Included in the bill is another tax credit equal to 50 percent of funds spent on new rail infrastructure, like switches and side-track, to serve new or expanding business in Mississippi, capped at \$1 million per project. This additional incentive will help attract new industry to rural and economically distressed areas. The text of the bill can be found [here](#).

Short line railroads in Mississippi championed this effort and ASLRRRA member [Mickelson & Company](#) played a critical supporting role. Mississippi has now joined seven other states that have short line tax credit programs: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Oregon, with one more state possibly enacting a similar law this year.

If your railroad operates in a state that does not yet have a short line railroad tax credit and you would like to get involved in creating one, reach out to your fellow railroads in the state, your state railroad association if there is one or to us at ASLRRRA and we can point you in the right direction to get started.

## ASLRRRA Joins Coalition to Prioritize Infrastructure Law Funds on Projects Easing Supply Chain Congestion

As the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) moves to implement the recently passed Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), ASLRRRA and a host of other key infrastructure and freight stakeholders [wrote to the DOT](#) about how best to target billions of dollars in new resources made available by the new bill.

As the DOT decides which projects should be funded through discretionary dollars, ASLRRRA and others urged the agency to apply resources to projects that "will facilitate and ease the movement of goods." Programs like CRISI, INFRA, Megaprojects and others should be targeted to improving infrastructure that will resolve supply-chain snarls and congestion that has become commonplace, the group argued.

**2022 ASLRRRA TRAINING SEMINARS** click to learn more

May 17-18	FRA Engineer/Conductor (240/242) and Railroad Operating Rules (217) Training	July 26-28	General Code of Operating Rules (GCOR) Training
June 7-8	FRA Drug & Alcohol (219) Training	August 9-10	Advanced Designated Supervisor of Locomotive Engineers (DSLE) Training
Coming soon	ASLRRRA Leadership Development Training, Regulatory Module	Coming soon	FRA Roadway Worker/Bridge Worker Safety Training

The graphic features a central image of a railroad track curving into the distance, with a stylized circuit board pattern overlaid on it. The text is arranged in a grid-like fashion around this central image, with each seminar entry in a colored box.

## ASLRRA New Members

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

### ASLRRA Welcomes Three New Associate Business Members



[Hydrogen On Demand Technologies \(HOD Tec\)](#), based in San Jose, California, overcomes the limitations of traditional hydrogen production by extracting hydrogen from water when and where it's needed - onsite or onboard, for diesel hydrogen assist or for hydrogen fuel production - instead of centrally producing, storing, and transporting it. HOD Tec is the leading worldwide provider of Diesel Hydrogen Assist Technology (D-HAT™), a certified, aftermarket H2 generator for large diesel internal combustion engines including those powering locomotives, trucks, buses, marine and heavy equipment. D-HAT™ provides a hydrogen-assisted fuel burn that enhances

the combustion characteristics of diesel engines, significantly reducing NOx, particulate matter and CO2 exhaust emissions while improving MPG. Our primary contact is Vice President of Sales [Tony DeVico](#), who can also be reached on (619) 733-4801.



[LiveView Technologies](#), based in Orem, Utah, provides cutting-edge surveillance technology. It combines proprietary software and hardware for a completely mobile, cloud-based security solution. Its units do not require power or internet, can be set up in 30 minutes or less, and can be deployed anywhere in the world.

Our primary contact is Mark Studdert, who can be reached at [mark.studdert@lvt.com](mailto:mark.studdert@lvt.com). **Learn more about the company in Booths #112/114 in the Expo Hall at our annual conference and exhibition.**



[Revolution Rail Co.](#), based in North Creek, New York, launched in July 2017 with six railbikes and has grown to become a leader in the railbiking industry. Today, it runs a fleet of railbikes in five different locations and has taken more than 150,000 customers out on the rails to experience nature in a new way. Owner [Robert Harte](#) is our primary contact and can be reached at (917) 334-1288 or [robert@revrail.com](mailto:robert@revrail.com). **Learn more about them in booth #407 at our annual expo in St. Louis this weekend.** Many thanks to United Shortline Insurance Services' Lou Schillinger for recommending that they join.

## ASLRRRA Members of Note

Short line and regional railroads are known for their willingness to think outside the box to build their business and better serve customers. ASLRRRA is proud to showcase the accomplishments of its members, focusing this week on [Blackwell Northern Gateway Railroad](#), a line between Wichita, Kansas and Tulsa and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma operated by US Rail Partners.

### Blackwell Northern Gateway Railroad Grows Business Through Its Diverse Offerings



Photo Courtesy of John Pollack, BNG

*A Blackwell Northern Gateway Railroad locomotive moves railcars carrying plastic pellets meant for the BOSTD America facility. The railroad recently marketed the site, which had sat empty for years, bringing BOSTD in and restoring full-time operations.*

Building in Blackwell, Oklahoma closed the plant, it sat empty for years. BNG was able to market the property and bring in a new company, geogrid manufacturer BOSTD America, turning an idle location into a full-time operation.

In addition to bringing in BOSTD America, BNG is busy in other areas of marketing and development, making the most of its connections with railroad partners and state and local authorities to drive business. BNG worked with the Blackwell Chamber of Commerce to develop the Blackwell Industrial Authority Park, allowing BNG to offer warehouse, transloading and other services to customers. At the same time, partnerships with other railroads are mutually beneficial, with BNG promoting another's storage-in-transit availability while they highlight BNG's car leasing and sales assistance.

BNG has also created USRP Logistic Services offering car inspection, rail car and locomotive repair and maintenance, track maintenance and a number of other services. Altogether, BNG's efforts have resulted in a 14.3 percent financial gain in the past five years, a testament to the railroad's multi-pronged business approach.

Short line railroads are no strangers to multi-tasking, and shipping goods is often only a part of the diverse services offered to customers. ASLRRRA member Blackwell Northern Gateway Railroad (BNG) embodies this aspect of short line business in its operations, resulting in notable growth.

In order to have goods to ship, railroads need to attract and keep customers. At times such an effort entails marketing sites along a rail line as an ideal place for companies to set up shop, and BNG undertook such a project. After the owner of the Electron

## ASLRRRA Announcements

### Reminder to Supplier Members: Don't Forget to Vote

Voting is still open for a seat on the ASLRRRA Board of Directors representing associate business members. Voting information and instructions were sent to the primary contact at every supplier member last week.

Please note that the online voting period will close at noon (Central time) on May 2. There will be no in-person voting via paper ballots at the annual conference this year so please vote online.

Only one vote is allowed per company membership. Please contact [Kathy Keeney](#) if you have questions or need a resend of your company's voting materials and instructions.

### Receive Important Regulatory Training at ASLRRRA's Summer Seminars

Few spots remain for the first two of ASLRRRA's [summer training seminars](#). Individuals can sign up to attend the [FRA Engineer/Conductor \(Part 240-242\) and Railroad Operating Rules \(Part 217\)](#) course and the [FRA Drug and Alcohol Training \(Part 219\)](#) course.

The engineer and conductor and operating rules course will be held May 17 to 18 while the drug and alcohol training course will be held June 7 to 8. Both will take place at the Aloft Nashville West End in Nashville, Tennessee.

Two other courses, the [Comprehensive General Code of Operating Rules \(GCOR\) Training Seminar](#) and the [Advanced Designated Supervisor of Locomotive Engineers \(DSLE\) Training Seminar](#) will take place July 26 to 28 and August 9 and 10, respectively, both in Cedar Falls, Iowa. ASLRRRA has partnered with Iowa Northern Railway to offer these courses.

More information about two additional seminars, ASLRRRA's Leadership Development Training, Regulatory Module and FRA Roadway Worker/Bridge Worker Safety (214) Training is coming soon.

### ASLRRRA Mourns Passing of Great Lakes Central Railroad's Lou Ferris, Jr.

ASLRRRA is saddened to report that member Great Lakes Central Railroad Owner and Board Chair Lou Ferris, Jr. has passed away.

Watco Companies Chairman Rick Webb, reflecting on his connections with Ferris, said, "I consider myself very lucky and privileged to be able to call Lou Ferris a great friend. Lou was a terrific businessman who always protected the interests of his team, his customers and his family by using his tremendous communication and negotiating skills to reach the best position possible for them. I will always cherish the times spent with Lou because of his love for life and his ability to tell you what was on his mind and deliver it in a way that made you feel valued and appreciated. Lou was a one-of-a-kind leader and family man that will never be forgotten."

Read Ferris's obituary [here](#). In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to [The Salvation Army](#) in his honor.

## ASLRRA Out and About

### Gelnar Provides Update at Outback Railroad Association Meeting

ASLRRA Vice President of Safety and Compliance JR Gelnar attended the Outback Railroad Association annual meeting in Deadwood, South Dakota. He provided a regulatory update to the short line railroad representatives and supplier vendors in attendance.



## ASLRRA Webinars – Live or On-Demand

### Upcoming Webinars

#### [Part 243 Railroad Obligations with Contractors](#) – June 1, 2022

Join FRA Staff Director Rob Castiglione to understand what your obligations are as a railroad when engaging with contractors under Part 243, including Roadway Worker Protection (RWP). Attendees

will have an opportunity to participate in Q&A at the end of the presentation. Presenters include Castiglione and ASLRRA's Jo Strang and JR Gelnar.

This webinar is free for both ASLRRA members and non-members.

Click [here](#) to learn more about ASLRRA's education offerings.



## Industry Events and Announcements

### NRSS Offers Four Track Safety Standards Courses

ASLRRA member National Railroad Safety Services, Inc. (NRSS) is offering [four CFR Part 213 Track Safety Standards training courses](#) this summer and fall. ASLRRA-member employees who attend may be eligible for a scholarship from the Association to help offset registration and travel costs.

The course is meant to aid the development and qualification of railroad track inspectors and covers classes of track 1-5, CFR Part 213 Subparts A-F. Upcoming courses are scheduled for June 14-17 in Arlington, Texas; Aug. 2-5 in Frederick, Maryland; Sept. 27-30 in Chicago, Illinois; and Oct. 11-14 in Albany, New York. Follow the link above for more information or to register for a course.

ASLRRA also offers scholarships that can be used by employees of small railroads to pay for course registration fees and travel and lodging costs. Follow this link to access a [scholarship application](#) form, or contact ASLRRA's [Julie Duriga](#) with any scholarship questions.

Click [here](#) for a calendar of industry events.

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