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ASLRRRA STATEMENT FOLLOWING BUILD AMERICA 250 ACT MARKUP

WASHINGTON, May 22, 2026 – On behalf of the nation’s 600+ small business short line freight railroads, the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRRA) appreciates the House T&I Committee’s bipartisan work to advance a surface transportation reauthorization bill, the BUILD America 250 Act. Short lines are encouraged by some provisions in the bill and look forward to continuing to work with Congress to improve others as the legislation advances.

“As a first draft, the BUILD America 250 Act has some welcome provisions that will enhance safety, capacity, and reliability for short lines, including a robust authorization of the successful CRISI program and a continuation of funding for the Section 130 grade crossing program. However, if the final legislation provides only an authorization for CRISI without the guaranteed funding included under the IJJA, it will represent a step backward for short line rail investment,” said Chuck Baker, President, ASLRRRA.

“Beyond that, during the House T&I Committee markup, we were disappointed to see an amendment accepted to increase truck weights to 91,000 pounds in some states through a 10 year pilot program. Heavier trucks would shift freight from the safer and more sustainable rail network onto the more dangerous and already overburdened and heavily subsidized highway network.”

“Additionally, the Committee adopted a broad Railway Safety Act amendment. While short line railroads

were not directly targeted, these provisions would nonetheless impose costly and inflexible mandates on the rail network as a whole if passed into law. At a time when the public is concerned with rising costs, these amendments do not serve our nation well. We pledge to work constructively with Congress to improve this bill as it advances.”

Beyond CRISI and Section 130, the BUILD America 250 Act also contains some other positive provisions with potential to significantly improve short line infrastructure and operations, including:

- creation of a new multimodal Surface Transportation Accelerator Grants (STAG) grant program with contract authority and broad rail eligibility across all categories,
- increased multimodal flexibility within the INFRA grant program,
- continued flexibility in the Highway Freight Formula Program,
- a robust reauthorization of the Rail Crossing Elimination Program,
- creation of a new Emergency Relief program for rail disaster response,
- codification of the Short Line Safety Institute, and
- expansion of the RRIF loan program.

Among the bill’s regulatory provisions, some reforms are constructive — including the 50-year freight car rule and encouragement of more performance-based rulemaking — while others raise concerns, including proposals to study expanded third-party access to private railroad rights-of-way without just compensation and a new manual track inspection and TGMS mandate.

Overall, although modest steps toward a user-pay system were identified for the Highway Trust Fund (HTF), the fund is still set to rely upon a massive general fund transfer to close the gap between the planned contract authority spending of \$95B per year and HTF revenue of approximately \$45B per year.

“As Congress continues work on surface transportation reauthorization, policymakers should either restore the Highway Trust Fund to a more sustainable user-funded model where our truck competitors pay something resembling a fair share or reconsider the structure of a system that provides guaranteed,

heavily subsidized contract authority for highways and transit while rail programs are left to rely on unpredictable and insufficient annual discretionary appropriations,” said Baker.

About ASLRRRA - The American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRRA) is a non-profit trade association representing the interests of the nation’s 603 short line and regional railroads (Class II and III railroads) and railroad supply company members in legislative and regulatory matters. Short lines operate 47,500 miles of track in 49 states, or approximately 29% of the national railroad network, touching in origination or termination one out of every five cars moving on the national railroad system, serving customers who otherwise would be cut off from the national railroad network, particularly in rural and small-town America. Categorized as small businesses, short lines transport all commodities, with the agriculture, energy and manufacturing sectors being particularly reliant on short line service. www.aslrra.org