

RTA Stands With ASLRRA During Inaugural Short Line Advocacy Day



Meeting with Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-MS)



Meeting with Rep. Scott Desjarlais, M.D. (R-TN)



ASLRRA President Chuck Baker, left, and RTA Executive Director Dr. Nate Irby

The Railway Tie Association sponsored the inaugural Short Line Advocacy Day on May 17 in Washington, with RTA Executive Director Dr. Nate Irby and other RTA members participating in congressional meetings to personally voice concerns and share their views with elected officials.

Organized by the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRA) and held during Infrastructure Week, Short Line Advocacy Day brought individuals from Class II and III railroads, suppliers and supporting association staff members to the capitol to participate in meetings with legislators.

“The association advocates for short lines every day in Washington, but nothing beats our small railroad members coming into town to personally explain how Congressional action impacts their critical contributions to the U.S. freight rail industry and the greater supply chain,” said ASLRRA President Chuck Baker. ASLRRA represents the industry’s 600 short lines and their suppliers.

“This year, in the face of six bills being considered in Congress addressing rail safety, it is more critical than ever that our members come to Washington to share their unique American success story.” Baker added.

This year, the industry called upon Congress to craft legislation carefully to address several primary concerns:

- Avoid mandates that do not provide a proven safety benefit and that would risk diverting finite resources away from efforts such as upgrading railroad track, or worse, would risk shifting freight from rail onto public roadways, putting short lines out of business, and hurting shippers and local economies.
- Support funding for the Consolidated Rail

Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) program, which is the Federal Railroad Administration’s most popular and over-subscribed grant program. Since 2017, more than \$1.5B in CRISI funds have been invested, helping build a world-class, sustainable network for freight rail. Short lines in 47 of 50 states and hundreds of shippers have directly benefited from the CRISI program.

- Support funding for the Short Line Safety Institute (SLSI), which improves safety culture awareness and practices for small railroads. Thanks to federal funding, SLSI provides training at no cost to railroads, including leadership and hazmat training.
- Oppose all efforts to increase truck length or weight limits, including any pilot programs. Congress should reject these measures because bigger and heavier trucks will shift freight from rail to trucks, increasing hazards to the driving public, increasing the costs of road maintenance, and causing a negative impact on the environment. Bigger and heavier trucks increase road congestion and lead to a higher crash risk. In addition, moving freight by truck instead of rail increases greenhouse gas emissions by up to 75 percent, reversing the environmental benefits of rail transportation.
- Support disaster relief for short line railroads. With the rate of natural disasters like hurricanes, wildfires, earthquakes and floods increasing, Congress should ensure small railroads have the necessary resources after catastrophic natural disasters to help rebuild, instead of being forced to end operations, abandon customers, and disrupt the supply chain. “These meetings offer members of

Congress and their staff an opportunity to better understand the levers that drive or hinder the success of the small freight railroad industry and its important contributions to U.S. supply chain resilience and fluidity,” Baker added.

“Despite the recent concerns over railroad safety, our group (Shortline Advocacy Day 2023) was strategic in engaging a wide range of elected officials (150 meetings, at large) in discussions on rail safety, truck weights, and short line disaster relief legislation,” Irby reported. “Legislators were receptive to the distinguishing characteristics between Class I, II and III railroads; encouraged by the proactive self-imposed approaches railroads are doing to raise that safety bar; and open to site visits and desired follow-ups. It was refreshing, enlightening and productive. RTA is proud to support ALL railroads and the crosstie supply chain, the continuation of openly accepting feedback from our constituents, and the flexibility to adapt to current and future direction. Please consider participating in these advocacy events in the future, as it’s fulfilling, diagnostic and impactful—i.e., all good things.”

Eddie Horton, regional sales manager for Stella-Jones Corporation and a member of the Railway Tie Association said attending the event gave him a chance to lend Stella-Jones’ voice to the important causes that have a tremendous impact on every railroads, and he urged other members to participate in advocacy events. “The future course of our industry is so often decided and changed in the halls of Congress. It is so vital for us to be present and take our seat at the table when the opportunity arises so that we can influence those changes and ensure the course chosen represents the best future for RTA and our industry as a whole.” ■