

RTA Members Blitz Capitol Hill In Support Of Freight Rail Industry

Representatives from the nation's freight railroads, labor groups, rail suppliers, and state and local officials joined for the annual Railroad Day On Capitol Hill event on March 3.

The event gave them the opportunity to discuss with legislators the need to preserve the current regulatory framework that has allowed the railroad industry to invest billions of dollars into the nation's rail infrastructure.

These groups urged Congress to continue supporting policies that encourage the freight rail industry to deliver safe, reliable and efficient service so that American businesses can successfully compete in the global marketplace.

"Americans whose livelihoods depend on a healthy rail industry want Congress to know that freight rail is working for our country, and carrying the investment load so taxpayers don't have to," said Edward R. Hamberger, CEO of the Association of American Railroads. "Freight rail is the backbone of our nation's economy, and we need to maintain policies that keep that possible."

Advocates for freight rail met with legislators to discuss how rail differs from other modes of surface transportation, most notably that freight rail invests private capital—more than \$24 billion this year alone—in its own infrastructure, while other modes of transportation rely heavily on taxpayer subsidies. When government budgets are

tight, rail advocates asserted, it is important to support policies that will encourage railroads to continue private investment.

"As the economy grows and American businesses and manufacturing expand, freight rail continues to deliver for the nation," Hamberger added. "In addition to investing billions into our physical network, the freight rail industry will be hiring thousands of new employees this year. We want to thank all the representatives, suppliers, advocates and government officials who came to Capitol Hill to tell their story about how freight rail has improved their lives."

The annual Railroad Day on Capitol Hill event is also at the foundation of communicating the importance of extending the 45G railroad tax credit, said Linda Bauer Darr, executive director of the American Short Line and Regional Railroad Association (ASLRRRA).

"Extending the 45G tax credit is critical to our industry's ability to serve our customers well and safely," she said. "Making it permanent would help to build an environment of certainty around rail investment that would be transformative for our industry."

Railroad Day participants also discussed the need to reject potentially dangerous and



Jim Gauntt with 45G sponsor Earl Blumenauer (D-OR)



Brad Crawford of NS greets Brett Guthrie (R-KY).



Adam Nordstrom briefs 530+ Day on the Hill attendees.



Jim Gauntt with one of the delegations meeting with John Lewis (D-GA), center.

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Association**

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unfair proposals to increase the truck size and weight allowances. Allowing heavier and larger trucks, rail advocates maintain, will increase the damage big trucks cause to the nation's roads and highways while diverting freight traffic from the self-sustaining railroads. The price tag for repairing this damage is shouldered by taxpayers. Rail advocates will make the case for the trucking industry, not general revenue funds, to pay for the wear and tear caused by their trucks.

"All of these efforts help railroads maintain and improve their ability to serve America's increasing freight transportation needs," said RTA Executive Director Jim Gauntt. "Going forward, we hope to make 45G permanent so we can work on more surface transportation issues that will improve the health of the nation's rail industry." ■



NRC-sponsored Day on the Hill dinner.



350 meetings were held throughout the day.



Clockwise, Ed Hamberger of AAR, Jerry Vest of Genesee & Wyoming, Ed McKechnie of Watco Companies and Keith Hartwell (retiring) of Chambers, Conlon and Hartwell speak at the ASLRRA dinner following Day on the Hill.