



The Capitol Report March 5th, 2004

Provided by The Georgia Railroad Association

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The General Assembly recessed yesterday after completing its 29th legislative day, and will reconvene Tuesday, March 9. The legislature is scheduled to meet for regular legislative days only on Tuesday and Friday of next week. Under that schedule, the 33rd legislative day would likely fall on Tuesday, March 16. All bills must pass their House of origin by the 33rd day to be eligible for further consideration.

Cost Sharing bill set for hearing.

Senate Transportation Chairman Tommie Williams has indicated that legislation to provide for cost sharing of grade crossing maintenance could be heard in the Transportation Committee as early as next Tuesday. SB 585 was introduced by Senator Jeff Mullis of Chickamauga, Senate President Pro Tempore Eric Johnson of Savannah, and Senator Steve Thompson of Powder Springs.

SB 585 would require that cities and counties provide road surface material for maintenance of railroad grade crossings on their streets and roads. Since the Georgia Department of Transportation often participates in crossing maintenance on state highways, the DOT was not included in this cost sharing bill. GRA supports this bill because it would eliminate the requirement that railroads bear the entire cost of grade crossing maintenance, even though the road surfaces do not belong to the railroads, are not used by the railroads, and generally are not damaged by the railroads.

Senator Mullis, the bill's lead sponsor, is a community planner and fire chief for the City of Chickamauga, and chairman of the Economic Development and Tourism Committee in the Senate. In addition to Chairman Williams and co-sponsor Steve Thompson, the Transportation Committee that will hear the bill includes the following Senators.

Mike Crofts of Conyers
Joey Brush of Martinez
Nathan Dean of Rockmart
Valencia Seay of College Park

Don Cheeks of Augusta
Ginger Collins of Marietta
Liane Levetan of Atlanta
Charlie Tanksley of Marietta

GRA members are encouraged to contact members of the Senate Transportation Committee who represent areas where they have operations in support of SB 585.

Bill Status Report

SB 325 by Harp of Midland would amend Title 46 relating to operation of trains so as to provide that no railroad shall operate remote controlled locomotives. A carryover bill from 2003. Still in Senate Transportation Committee.

HB 1022 by McCall of Elberton would make technical corrections and eliminate antiquated sections of current law governing railroads. This GRA bill deletes from the Georgia code those provisions preempted by federal law, as well as out-dated references to steam engines. For reasons that remain unclear, railroad unions are opposing this bill. Approved by House Transportation Committee, but remains in Senate Rules Committee.

HB 1254 by Channell of Greensboro specifies that railroads have no legal obligation to petition for closure of a grade crossing, and that local governments have no legal obligation to approve a petition for closures of a grade crossing. A GRA bill. Passed House. Passed Senate Transportation Committee and now on Senate General Calendar.

HB 1235 by Roberts of Ocilla would broaden the truck weight variances allowed for agricultural products. Current law provides for limited weight variances on county roads for forest products, live poultry, cotton, feed, granite, solid waste and concrete. HB 1235 would allow a 10% variance from the weight limits for all agricultural products within a 150 mile radius of the farm. The bill is still in the House Transportation Committee.

HB 1324 by Watson of Decatur would make it unlawful for a railroad to "to deny, delay, or interfere" with medical treatment or first aid to an employee injured on the job. It would also be unlawful for a railroad to discipline or threaten discipline to an employee for requesting medical treatment. Subcommittee hearing held Feb. 27. Still in Workplace Safety Subcommittee of the House Industrial Relations Committee.

HB 1456 by Greene of Cuthbert to provide for increased penalties for hijacking and theft of cargo; amended to delete provision that fines be sent to the police agency of the arresting officer. Passed by House Special Judiciary Committee.

2004 Associate Members

The following companies have renewed their associate memberships with the Georgia Railroad Association for 2004. The deadline for 2004 membership dues was March 1, 2004.

Adams Warnock, Inc.	A&K Railroad Materials, Inc.
APAC	Century Group
Crouch Engineering	Dixie Precast
Full Service Railroad Consulting, Inc.	Georgia Operation Lifesaver
Georgia Rail Consultants	Healey Railroad Corporation
Koppers, Inc.	L. B. Foster
Lanier Steel Products, Inc.	Neel-Schaffer, Inc.
Palmer & Cay of Georgia, Inc.	Performance Railway Services
Pointer Smith Contracting	Progress Rail
Rail Training & Consulting	Southern Rail Leasing
Tifton Terminal Railway Museum	Trinity Rail Group
Zurich North America	

GRA Spring Conference in Savannah.

The 6th Annual GRA Transportation Conference will be June 2-4, 2004 at the new Westin Resort in Savannah. A link to the resort is on the GRA website homepage. If you are interested in serving on the programs committee for the conference please contact Sharon Dunn at the GRA office 770-516-4636 or via email at sharondunn@alltel.net

Remember to use the GRA website when shopping for goods and services. It's fast and easy! Just go to www.georgiarailroad.org and click on "directory" in the left column of the home page. Then click on "services" at the top of the directory page for a list of service providers from "bridges" to "welding."