

ARDOT Newsletter

February 2024



SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

- Construction Management Program
- Business Development Program
- Capability Statement Design
- Business Plan Development
- Technical Assistance



Could Arkansas see more passenger rail opportunities? Time will tell.

The Arkansas Department of Transportation is asking for the public's input on a revised plan for one of the state's biggest economic impactors.

The survey is asking for thoughts and concerns to revise the state's rail plan - a plan that hasn't been changed since 2015.

"We want to identify and try to prioritize future investments in rail," said Travis Brooks, Asst. Division Head for Planning with ARDOT. "We are using the survey to get the public's opinion about freight and passenger rail and opportunities and needs or any challenges they have so we can integrate that into the planning."

Brooks said there is currently only one passenger train in the state and with this survey, they are also looking to see if there is a bigger need.

"That passes through Texarkana, Little Rock, Walnut Ridge, and a few other stops in the state," said Brooks. "We are hearing interest for having additional opportunities on this line, the Texas Eagle, and we are also hearing about interest in additional passenger rail opportunities in the state."

According to transportation officials, Arkansas railroads move 150 million tons of product in and out of Arkansas each year. That's over \$300 billion dollars in goods. Randy Zook, president of the Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce, said that is a substantial contribution.

"Some parts of the state don't have good rail service so anything that increases that available helps the economy because makes it possible for more products to use low-cost transportation," said Zook.

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OSHA Is Not Backing Down

Even if you did not directly experience last summer's heat, you probably read or heard about it. Historically high temperatures scorched the country from coast to coast, and there are no signs that this heat will abate anytime soon. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 436 people have died due to workplace heat exposure since 2011. In the same time period, there were an additional 2,700 cases of heat-related illnesses among workers. Now — quite literally more than ever — it is critical for employers to take steps to ensure their workers are protected from extreme heat.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) does not provide a standard specific to this issue. However, OSHA's General Duty Clause requires all employers to provide a safe workplace for employees, and OSHA believes protecting employees against heat hazards falls under that duty. It recently emphasized the importance of employers taking steps to reduce the risks that extreme heat poses to employees. OSHA has initiated a National Emphasis Program (NEP) on heat, which intensifies its efforts to address heat-related occupational hazards. The program particularly homes in on at-risk geographic areas and industries, including construction and agriculture. Last year's extreme heat even prompted action from the White House. On July 27, 2023, President Joe Biden issued a statement noting that the U.S. Department of Labor will continue ramping up its crackdown on heat-related safety violations, including increasing inspections — both programmed and unprogrammed — in the high-risk industries mentioned above. Biden also specifically asked the DOL to issue its first-ever Hazard Alert for extreme heat. OSHA thereafter released this alert, which reminds employers of their "legal and moral responsibility" not to assign work in hot conditions without adequate protection for workers. The alert lists the following guidance to employers:

- Provide adequate water, rest breaks and shade or a cool rest area for employees.
- Give new or returning employees the chance to gradually acclimate to working in hot temperatures, train and plan for emergencies, and monitor for heat signs and symptoms.
- Train employees on heat illness prevention, signs of heat illness and how to act immediately if they or another employee appears to be suffering from a heat-related illness.

About The ARDOT

The goal of the DBE Supportive Services Program is to increase the number of DBEs participating on ARDOT contracts and facilitate the opportunity for DBEs to obtain contracts. The services are designed to:

- Assist established construction firms to move them from bidding as a subcontractor to bidding as a Prime Contractor to produce sound bids.
- Provide access to training increases DBE expertise in handling of daily business operations.



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