House Bill 820 (AS PASSED HOUSE AND SENATE)
By: Representatives Tanner of the 9th, Smyre of the 135th, Carpenter of the 4th, McCall of the 33rd, and Powell of the 32nd

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

To amend Article 3 of Chapter 2 of Title 32 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to officers in the Department of Transportation, so as to provide for state investment in railways and railroad facilities and equipment; to provide for a definition; to provide that the commissioner of transportation may administer a Georgia Freight Railroad Program; to provide for subprograms within such program; to provide for annual reporting; to provide for standards for expenditure of funds; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

SECTION 1.

Article 3 of Chapter 2 of Title 32 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to officers in the Department of Transportation, is amended by adding a new Code section to read as follows:

“32-2-41.3. (a) For purposes of this Code section, the term 'short line railway' means any carrier designated as a Class III by the Surface Transportation Board.

(b) The Georgia Freight Railroad Program shall be administered, subject to appropriations, at the discretion of the commissioner, in order to enhance the state's investment in freight rail projects for public benefit and to support a safe and balanced transportation system for the state.

(c) The Georgia Freight Railroad Program shall be composed of three subprograms as follows:

(1) The Rail Enhancement Plan may acquire, lease, or improve railways or railroad equipment, including rail crossings, rolling stock, rights of way, or rail facilities;

(2) The Rail Preservation Plan may acquire, lease, or improve short line railways or assist other appropriate entities to acquire, lease, or improve short line railways; and

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The Rail Industrial Plan may build, construct, restructure, or improve industrial access to railroad tracks and related facilities.

In administering the program, the commissioner shall make every effort to balance such program among all regions of this state and among the various applicants.

Following the end of each fiscal year, the commissioner or his or her designee shall submit an annual report on the activities of the Georgia Freight Railroad Program to the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives and shall make such report available to the members of the General Assembly.

Prior to the expenditure of state funds, the commissioner shall make a determination whether such expenditure is ample consideration for a substantial public benefit in compliance with Article III, Section VI, Paragraph VI (a) of the Georgia Constitution.’

SECTION 2.

All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.