



For Immediate Release

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NLX MOVES FORWARD FOLLOWING FEDERAL APPROVAL ON PREFERRED ROUTE

The mood was upbeat at the Aug. 31 meeting of the Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance, thanks to a major hurdle being cleared with the Federal Rail Administration for the Northern Lights Express (NLX) passenger rail proposal.

The Federal Rail Administration in July approved the preferred route for NLX. The route uses existing BNSF Railway track from Minneapolis to Duluth in the Highway 65 and Interstate 35 corridor. The approval is an important step for addressing the state's transportation needs, according to U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar.

"A 21st-century economy demands a 21st-century transportation network," Senator Klobuchar said. "Safe and efficient transportation is critical to our state. The approval of the preferred route for this project is another step toward improving travel for Minnesotans and laying the groundwork to address our state's transportation needs in the future."

At the August meeting, the NLX Alliance, made up of elected officials from local governments in the 155-mile corridor, reviewed plans to complete environmental documentation on the selected route and get started on a service development plan, survey and other work to advance this high speed rail initiative.

An ambitious schedule is required if trains are going to run at 110 miles per hour within three years of securing construction funds, as many NLX Alliance members and supporters envision, including US Congressman Keith Ellison.

"Transit projects like the Northern Lights Express create jobs, and in the long-term they reduce congestion and help protect our environment," Congressman Ellison said. "A few years from now, when we're hopefully riding a fast NLX train, we'll be grateful to the local supporters who championed the project through the approval process."

Last December, the NLX Alliance approved a report for the Federal Rail Administration that demonstrated NLX has the potential for a positive benefit cost ratio. The analysis showed the Alliance's preferred route met Federal Rail Administration criteria for capital costs, ridership and revenue. The

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analysis looked at alternate routes in historic rail corridors where some of the tracks had been removed.

Receiving the Federal Rail Administration’s concurrence on the preferred route was a crucial step, according to St. Louis County Commissioner Steve Raukar, chair of the NLX Alliance.

“Over the course of their seven month review, the FRA critiqued our project from all angles,” Commissioner Raukar said. “In the end, I believe the data helped the FRA become a stronger supporter of the project.”

A \$5 million federal grant awarded in May 2011 and a \$3 million appropriation from the State of Minnesota will allow for preliminary engineering to begin spring 2012. Additional Federal Rail Administration approvals will be needed along the way. Up to 80 percent of the total project’s cost, currently estimated between \$650 and \$750 million, may be federally funded.

About the Alliance: The Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance is a joint powers board formed to explore options for renewing passenger rail service in the 155-mile corridor. Representatives include the regional rail authorities of Hennepin, Anoka, Isanti, Pine, and St. Louis and Lake counties, the cities of Minneapolis and Duluth, and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe. Also participating are Douglas County, Wis., Superior, Wis., and other corridor agencies and communities. The NLX Alliance and its community partners work with the MN Department of Transportation Passenger Rail & Environmental Services offices to advance the project. More information is available at www.NorthernLightsExpress.org.