



NORTHERN LIGHTS EXPRESS

Minneapolis – Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance

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About the Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance

NLX is spearheaded by a joint powers board, called the Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance. It was formed in 2007 to explore options for renewing passenger rail service in the 155 mile corridor. The Alliance works with community partners and elected officials at the local, state and federal levels to move NLX forward. Already the Alliance has completed a feasibility study, continues to work closely with the BNSF Railway. The Alliance is working with the Minnesota Department of Transportation, Wisconsin Department of Transportation, and FRA on an environmental study anticipated to be completed by the end of 2010.

Alliance members include: the regional rail authorities of Hennepin, Anoka, Isanti, Pine, St. Louis and Lake Counties, and the cities of Minneapolis and Duluth. Also participating are Douglas County in Wisconsin, the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, the cities of Coon Rapids, Cambridge, Hinckley, Sandstone and Superior in Wisconsin, and other agencies along the corridor. The group is led by St. Louis County Commissioner Steve Raukar, chair, and Anoka County Commissioner Dan Erhart, vice-chair.



High Speed Passenger Rail is gaining momentum!

Comfortable, accessible, affordable rail service between Minneapolis and Duluth has been a vision of federal, state and local leaders. That vision has made significant progress toward reality. The proposed action offers an opportunity to provide reliable and competitive passenger rail service as a viable alternative to vehicular travel by:

- Decreasing travel times;
- Providing safe and reliable transit service; and
- Providing amenities to improve passenger travel quality and comfort.

Confirmation of the corridor's economic viability in the Northern Lights Express (NLX) Feasibility Study in 2007 supported funding for the next stage of the project. Over the next year, concept-level engineering plans and environmental review of NLX will be completed, facilitating completion of plans to begin construction in the next 5 years.

Recent accomplishments include:

- NLX was designated one of eight top priorities for development by the National Passenger Rail Study Group, headed by the U.S. Secretary of Transportation, in December 2007.
- NLX feasibility study completed in December 2007.
- Received \$1.1 million from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) in its first Capital Assistance Grant Program.
- \$475,000 designated for NLX in the Fiscal Year 2009 Omnibus Appropriations Bill.
- A consultant has been hired and work has begun on environmental review and documentation and associated preliminary engineering.
- \$825,000 invested by local cities and counties in the Corridor.
- \$900,000 of Minnesota bonding has been leveraged with the \$1.1 million from the FRA to start the environmental and preliminary engineering work.
- In the 2009 Minnesota legislative session, \$26 million in bonding for rail projects was passed.
- Four years into the planning process, NLX is uniquely positioned to take advantage of funding opportunities through both the 2008 Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act and the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

What is High Speed Rail?

High speed rail, just as its name implies, runs at higher maximum speeds than conventional rail. Improvements made to typical freight or passenger rail tracks to facilitate travel at these higher speeds include welded instead of butt-jointed rails and broader curves that allow comfortable travel at higher speeds. Parallel tracks and improved rail signaling systems facilitate travel by both high speed passenger service and freight rail in the same corridors. Safety improvements at roadway crossings better protect both rail and automobile travelers.

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Upcoming Public Meetings

Please join us at one of the following public meetings to learn about plans to advance the NLX corridor. Representatives of the Alliance and the consultant team will be available to answer your questions and receive input. Your participation is important!

Directions to each meeting location will be posted to www.NorthernLightsExpress.org

Cambridge, Minnesota

Thursday, December 3, 2009, 4:30 – 6:00 pm

Brief presentation at 5 pm

Armed Forces Reserve Community Center – Assembly Hall

505 Spirit River Drive (County Road 70)
Cambridge, MN 55008

Coon Rapids, Minnesota

Tuesday, December 8, 2009, 4:30 – 6:30 pm

Brief presentation at 5 pm

Anoka-Ramsey Community College

– Legacy Room (2nd Floor)
11200 Mississippi Blvd. NW
Coon Rapids, MN 55433

Superior, Wisconsin

Wednesday, December 9, 2009, 4:30 – 6:30 pm

Brief presentation at 5 pm

Superior Middle School - Cafeteria

3626 Hammond Ave., Superior, WI 54880

Hinkley, Minnesota

Thursday, December 10, 2009, 4:30 – 6:30 pm

Brief presentation at 5 pm

Fine Arts Center – Lobby

(enter from east parking lots at Hinckley-Finlayson High School)

201 Main St. E., Hinkley, MN 55037

For more information visit

www.NorthernLightsExpress.org

Bob Manzoline, St. Louis & Lake Regional Rail Authority,
phone: (218)254-2575

Jon Olson, Anoka County,
phone: (763)323-5789

Just as importantly, however, is a greater emphasis on passenger comfort and convenience. Rail stations are located in conjunction with other transportation facilities to allow easy connections to commuter rail, light rail transit, and busways as well as automobile facilities. Tickets are purchased at the station to enable quick and easy boarding with minimal delays at passenger stops. Once on the train, passengers are treated to a relaxing comfortable ride and high amenity service.

High speed rail connections between Minneapolis and Duluth will facilitate recreational and business travel alike. Connections in Minneapolis will allow continued travel along the Northstar corridor and to the south metro area along Hiawatha LRT as well as future LRT lines serving the Twin Cities region. Plans are in the works for high speed rail connections to Milwaukee, Chicago, and many destinations beyond.

Related planning efforts also underway

In addition to concept engineering and environmental documentation, a number of other planning efforts are underway that will support the NLX corridor. These efforts include:

- Station area planning at the Duluth Depot
- Planning for a multi-modal facility connection Northstar Commuter Rail, Hiawatha LRT, future Central Corridor LRT and NLX at the new Twins Ballpark
- Plans to extend the Northstar corridor to the St. Cloud area
- Station area planning in the communities of Sandstone, Hinkley, Cambridge and Mora
- Midwest Regional Rail Initiative Planning including connections from Chicago to Minneapolis
- Comprehensive Statewide Freight and Passenger Rail Plan

Evaluating the environmental impacts of NLX

NLX would provide transportation connections for a variety of passengers. However, transportation projects have the potential to negatively impact communities, natural environments and cultural resources if not planned and designed appropriately. Efforts are currently underway to identify critical resources in both the urban, suburban and rural areas of the corridor, and to take early measures to avoid or minimize impacts to those critical resources. NLX staff have initiated coordination with federal, state and local agencies to facilitate evaluation efforts.

Input from local communities is also critical to these efforts. The current NLX study has planned for meetings at three critical points in the planning process – project initiation, evaluation, and review of the environmental document – to inform planning and design at critical points in the project process. At each point in the process, we will hold meetings at a variety of locations throughout the corridor to encourage participation from residents and businesses.

The first series of meetings will be held December 3 – December 10, 2009. Please see sidebar – for more information about meeting locations. If you are not able to join us for one of these meetings, please visit the NLX website at www.NorthernLightsExpress.org to review project materials and provide your input via email. Your insights and input will be carefully considered and are appreciated.

