

# Northern Lights Express Public Opinion Survey Findings

June 2010

- 1. Most residents believe the region's highway and transit system will need improvement: the state has primary responsibility for making improvements.**
  - 71% of residents said transportation improvements are needed to spur economic growth and meet future needs; 20% of those strongly believe improvements are needed.
  - 69% of residents consider the state responsible for improving transportation, while an additional 21% believe the responsibility lies with a combination of federal, state and local governments.
  - High speed rail from Duluth to Minneapolis is a priority for residents, behind improvements to city and rural roads, and/or regional highways and bridges.
  
- 2. High NLX awareness; majority support.**
  - By a margin of 69%-31%, residents say they are familiar with the NLX proposal; 13% are "very familiar" while 16% are "not at all familiar."
  - NLX is supported 57%-40%, with strong supporters outnumbering strong opponents by a 17%-11% margin.
  - Duluth has the highest level of familiarity of the project at 89%.
  
- 3. Strong potential interest in using NLX, particularly for leisure travel.**
  - 54% of residents said they likely will use NLX and 51% said someone else in their household likely will use NLX.
  - Among most likely riders, most said they would board NLX trains in Coon Rapids (41%) or Duluth/Superior (36%), while most believe their most common NLX destination would be Minneapolis (77%).
  - Likely riders said they would use NLX for leisure or travel to the airport (74% for sports, arts and entertainment and 74% to travel to the airport via Hiawatha LRT), while 29% would use NLX for work and 6% for school.
  
- 4. The credibility of pro-NLX arguments outweighs that of opposition arguments.**
  - Economic benefit/good quality construction jobs (62% convincing), convenience and reliability (61% convincing) and connections to transit and other regional centers (60% convincing) are the strongest pro-NLX arguments studied. Nevertheless, all pro-NLX arguments were convincing to more than half of residents.
  - The most convincing opposition arguments include other more important transportation priorities for the region (47% convincing), high cost of development (43% convincing) and the speed of NLX isn't fast enough to get people to use the train instead of their cars (42% convincing).

*Decision Resources, Ltd., conducted a telephone survey of the attitudes of 514 residents of the North Metro Area suburbs and Northeastern Minnesota between February 17 – 26, 2010. Four random sample groups were used: City of Duluth, Central St. Louis County, the counties of Pine, Kanabec and Isanti, and Anoka County (along the Northern Lights Express Corridor). The overall sample was re-weighted to reflect the population sizes of each area. The results of the study have a margin of error of ±4.4% in 95 out of 100 cases.*



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## **MAJORITY OF CORRIDOR RESIDENTS SUPPORT NORTHERN LIGHTS EXPRESS TRAIN**

High public interest exists for Northern Lights Express (NLX) passenger rail among corridor residents, particularly for leisure travel, according to public opinion survey findings shared June 23 with members of the Minneapolis—Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance board in Pine City.

“This survey confirms that people support public investment to restore passenger rail service and will use it when it’s operational,” said St. Louis County Commissioner Steve Raukar, who serves as the Alliance chair. “In fact, 54 percent of residents said they likely will use NLX, many for leisure or travel to the airport, sports, arts and entertainment.”

In addition to leisure or travel to the airport, 29 percent of likely users would take NLX to work and another 6 percent to school.

Most residents believe the region’s highway and transit system needs improvement. Nearly three-quarters of residents said transportation improvements are needed to spur economic growth and meet future needs.

In other recent Alliance news, Congressman James Oberstar and U.S. Senators Amy Klobuchar and Al Franken have requested \$3 million in federal funds to support preliminary engineering activities.

“It’s an encouraging time for the project,” said Anoka County Commissioner Dan Erhart, vice-chair of the Alliance. “The survey gives us data to help us better communicate with the public at a crucial time when we’re gaining steam in the very competitive race for funding.”

NLX recently received authorization to access state bonding dollars for environmental and engineering work needed to move the project through the Federal Rail Administration process. Up to 80 percent federal funds are available to qualifying projects.

**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, and the cities of Minneapolis and Duluth. Also participating are the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, Douglas County, Wis., Superior, Wis., and other corridor agencies and communities. Information is available at [www.NorthernLightsExpress.org](http://www.NorthernLightsExpress.org).