



News Release

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For Immediate Release

Northern Lights Express passenger rail advocates not deterred by Senate vote

A slim majority of Minnesota state senators are attempting this week to stop progress on the Northern Lights Express project (NLX), the proposed passenger rail service between Minneapolis and Duluth. Project advocates say that, while the Senate's action is disappointing, the project is still very much in reach due to strong support in the Minnesota House and Governor's office.

The Senate amendment, which passed 35 to 31, prohibits the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) and the Metropolitan Council from spending money on the project.

The action comes on the heels of the Minnesota House of Representatives passing its Omnibus Transportation bill, 70-63. End of session negotiations this month between the House, Senate and Governor's Office will determine what happens next with NLX and if the state will be able to use the \$85 million appropriated in the House bill to unlock up to \$340 million in federal funds. That's enough to have people riding the train within three to four years.

The federal funding is a game changer in this debate, which has been going on for years, according to Sandstone Mayor Peter Spartz.

"We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity with the new federal dollars in the Infrastructure Bill," Spartz said. "Billions of dollars will be invested to connect communities and economies with rail across the country. If we let another state's train project benefit from Minnesota's federal tax dollars, I'll be very disappointed. Those dollars should come back to Minnesota to help our veterans, our seniors, our business people, our students, and more."

Spartz says public support has never been higher. Leading much of the community engagement since 2007 has been the NLX Alliance, formed with a coalition of county, city and tribal jurisdictions along the 152 miles of existing track. He notes a 2022 survey of 2,365 people, commissioned by the NLX Alliance, shows 86% of respondents support use of state money to construct NLX rail service.

Benefits of this project are many, beginning with the construction phase, where roughly 3,000 jobs will be created to extend stations in Minneapolis and Duluth and build stations in Coon Rapids, Cambridge, Hinckley, and Superior. Additionally, new safety improvements at rail crossings will save lives. Track improvements also will help commerce by making freight movement more efficient.

Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance

Administrative Agency: St. Louis & Lake Counties Regional Railroad Authority
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MnDOT conducted a cost-benefit analysis and found every \$1 invested in getting NLX up and running resulted in more than a dollar of value returned. That value includes a boost to the tourism industry of about \$400 million over 40 years. Property values will increase. Environmental sustainability benefits include emissions savings and CO2 reductions of \$50 million over 40 years.

Amtrak is anticipated to be the operational partner in the service. Ray Lang, Amtrak vice president of State-Supported Services is optimistic about the future.

“Last year Amtrak unveiled an expansive vision for passenger rail growth, one that sees demonstrated potential connecting important city pairs with frequent, drive-time competitive train service, like Duluth to the Twin Cities,” Lang said. “With \$12 billion in federal funding for passenger rail development nationally in the recently enacted bipartisan Infrastructure law, and the potential to match up to 80% of route development costs, the time to act to establish frequent train service between the Twin Ports and Twin Cities is now. Amtrak looks forward to continuing to work with Governor Walz, House and Senate leadership and members, to demonstrate NLX is a worthwhile investment in the economy and mobility of Minnesota citizens and visitors.”

Spartz says with four round trips daily, NLX advocates hope to give people more choices in where to live, work, play, attend school, and access needed services such as healthcare. Timing is key.

About the NLX Alliance

The Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance (NLX Alliance) was formed in 2007 to pursue the return of rail service to the corridor. Today, the NLX Alliance represents cities, counties, the Band of Ojibwe, and interested groups along 152 miles of existing BNSF Railway track. The NLX Alliance works with the Minnesota Department of Transportation, the project lead, to advocate for a data-driven process that will deliver fast, safe and efficient service between Minneapolis and Duluth with stops in Coon Rapids, Cambridge, Hinckley, and Superior. Learn more at NorthernLightsExpress.org.

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