

April 15, 1975

AMTRAK returns railroad passenger service to the Twin Ports after several years of no trains. The Arrowhead runs from Superior (Great Northern Depot) to Minneapolis (Great Northern Depot) with no stops. By winter additional station stops have been added at Sandstone and Cambridge. In the winter of 1977 service is extended to Duluth.

1985

On Easter Sunday, AMTRAK runs its last passenger train between Duluth and Minneapolis/St. Paul (Midway Station) ending ten years of service that started as the Arrowhead and ended as The Northstar. The service folds due to slow track speeds and other operational challenges.

February 2000

In conjunction with Midwest Rail Initiative, a study is done on the feasibility of returning traditional passenger train service between Duluth and the Twin Cities. The report is not favorable due to traditional speeds, lack of connectivity and only one train per day in the study.

August 2006

Minnesota Congressman Jim Oberstar calls a meeting in his office in Chisholm to review the report from 2000. Discussion focuses on the possibility of higher speeds, more trains operating in the corridor, the Casino in Hinckley, improved connectivity in Minneapolis, with the Northstar Commuter Rail and Hiawatha (later the Blue Line), and population growth in the last six years. A plan is conceived to form a grass roots organization through the corridor to revisit the opportunity of renewing passenger rail service between Duluth and Minneapolis.

2007

Creation of Alliance

A Joint Powers Board is developed to explore options for renewing passenger rail service in the 155 mile corridor between Duluth and Minneapolis. Initial members are the Regional Rail Authorities of Hennepin, Anoka, Isanti, Pine and St. Louis & Lake Counties, plus the cities of Minneapolis and Duluth along with the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, Superior, Wisconsin and Douglas County, Wisconsin. It is supported with assistance from numerous agencies and communities along the corridor. St. Louis County Commissioner Steve Raukar and Anoka County Commissioner Dan Erhart co-chair the effort to build the Joint Powers Board. The original meeting is held during the AMC conference in Rochester, MN.

Feasibility Study

A Comprehensive Feasibility Study with a business plan is conducted in 2007 for restoring rail passenger service between Minneapolis and the Twin Ports of Duluth/Superior. The work is done by a consortium of consultants lead by TEMS and SRF with engineering from Krech Ojard and Associates.

National Spotlight

In December of 2007, the National Passenger Rail Study Group identifies this corridor as one of the eight top priorities for development in the entire country. The group, headed by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation, says this corridor should be operational by 2015.

Outreach Ramps Up

Building on years of transit advocacy by individuals and agencies along the corridor, public outreach efforts pick up speed with dozens of presentations to public and private groups along the corridor.

Resolutions of support start to come. Some of the first to sign on are Andover, Anoka County, Braham, Coon Rapids, Hennepin County, Isanti County, Kanabec County, Duluth-Superior Metropolitan Interstate Council, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, Pine County, Proctor, Sandstone and the St. Louis & Lake Counties Regional Rail Authority.

Alliance members travel to Washington D.C. to meet with Congressional leaders. They receive a very warm and encouraging reception. Back in Minnesota, one-one-one meetings are held with legislators along the corridor. The general public receives information at county fairs, community gatherings and through local media.

2008

First official meeting of the Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance, a joint powers board, is held February 20 in Hinckley. Steve Raukar, St. Louis County Commissioner, is elected chair. Dan Erhart, Anoka County Commissioner, is elected vice chair. The Alliance receives the TEMS feasibility study report.

BNSF Railway, owners of the existing tracks in the corridor, provides feedback on the feasibility study. Railroad is extremely cooperative.

A name and logo are selected for the project. Northern Lights Express or NLX are chosen.

2009

Environmental Assessment begins as does Preliminary Engineering. Money to pay for these projects comes from a grant from the Federal Railroad Administration for \$1.1 million, a third of the annual total of \$3.3 million available nationwide for planning.

There is also a \$475,000 designated for the Northern Lights Express project in the TY 2009 Omnibus Appropriations.

\$900,000 comes from the State Bonding Bill and \$200,000 from the Alliance to pay for the work.

2010

Minnesota Comprehensive Freight and Passenger Rail Plan completed--recommends NLX as part of Statewide System.

Public support is confirmed! Results of a survey completed by Decision Resources, published June 23, 2010, indicate a majority of corridor residents support the Northern Lights Express train.

Congress appropriates \$500,000 for the Northern Lights Express project in FY 2010.

In September, the Department of Transportation announced it will contribute \$16 million towards the construction of the new \$40 million multi modal transit hub located in downtown Duluth. The hub will link local bus service with intercity bus service, taxi and car rentals, pedestrian and bike trails. It will eventually connect with Northern Lights Express.

St. Louis County funds Hub and Terminal study of St. Louis County Heritage & Arts Center, the Depot.

Minneapolis announces plans for their new Interchange in downtown.

In December, the Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance finalizes a report for the FRA that demonstrates the Northern Lights Express has the potential for a positive benefit cost ratio. The analysis shows the Alliance's preferred route meets FRA criteria for capital costs, ridership and revenue.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation approves \$3 million of the State's \$26 million dollars from the 2009 Bonding Authority for use on the NLX Project.

2011

Alliance Grows!

On February 23, 2011, the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe joins the NLX Alliance as a full voting member. The Band had always been financial supporters, but a change in State law allows them to become full partners in the project. The Mille Lacs Band operates one of the top destinations in Minnesota - the Grand Casino Hinckley.

In May, a \$5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation is announced. It will help move the Northern Lights Express project forward to the point where 30% of the engineering work is complete.

The Federal Rail Administration approves the preferred route the Alliance has proposed. The route uses existing BNSF Railway track from Minneapolis to Duluth in the Highway 65 and I-35 corridors.

MN DOT starts implementation of governance and financing of the Minnesota State Freight and Passenger Rail Plan. As a part of that, the Department of Transportation enters into a letter of understanding for development of NLX.

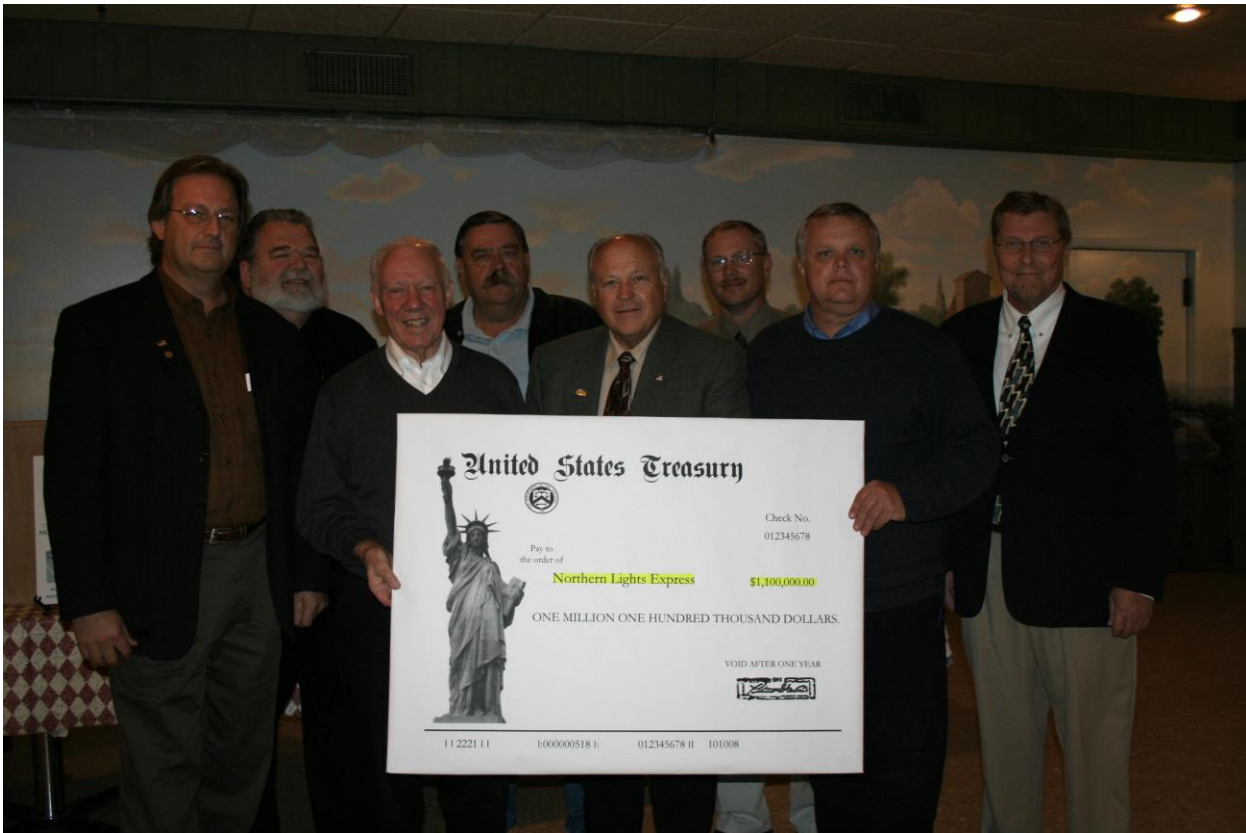
2013

MnDOT becomes the lead agency on the NLX Project. Please refer to their [website](#) for project updates. Partners include the Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and the Federal Railroad Administration.

The Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance (NLX Alliance) continues to advocate for needs of local constituents through the planning process.

2016

Cambridge becomes an official member of the joint powers board, now commonly called the NLX Alliance.



Check presentation October 2008 in Chisholm. St. Louis County Commissioner Steve Raukar, Douglass County Supervisor Doug Baker, Congressman James Oberstar, Isanti County Commissioner Larry Southerland, Anoka County Commissioner Dan Erhart, ????, ???spelling, and Lake County Commissioner Paul Bergman.



February 2011. St. Louis County Commissioner Steve Raukar, chair, Diane Gibbs newly appointed representative for Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, and Hennepin County Commissioner Mark Stenglein, vice chair.





May 2014. Len Bonander and Ken Buehler visit with people attending the Target Field Station Opening in Minneapolis.



2011. Vice-chair Robert Lilligren, Minneapolis City Council, and Chair Steve Raukar, St. Louis County Commissioner.