

Local View: Studies complete, NLX ready to build

By [Elissa Hansen](#) on Mar 20, 2018 at 5:10 p.m.

Recent news that the Federal Railroad Administration gave the Northern Lights Express passenger-rail proposal a green light to move forward was a reason to celebrate ("Northern Lights Express project cleared to seek funding," March 8).



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It also was a moment to strengthen our resolve to get the project across the finish line.

After 10 years of studies, we received the final approval, the finding of no significant impact, on the last bit of environmental work. With this finding in hand, the NLX project is eligible to apply to the federal government for up to 80 percent of the funds needed to finish engineering and to build the service, a cost estimated at \$550 million to \$600 million. Very few projects make it this far. The system is designed to weed out the weaker ideas. We've proven we're strong.

But there's a catch. Funding is uncertain in the current political environment.

I've seen tremendous public support for the train and its plan to travel up to 90 mph between the Twin Cities and Twin Ports, with six station stops along the way in Minneapolis, Coon Rapids, Cambridge, Hinckley, Superior, and Duluth.

People want the train because it'd be more than a transportation mode. It would attract economic development, jobs, and housing to communities along the line. Business people would use the commute time to be productive. Tourists would have new access to the wealth of amenities Minnesota offers. Students would have reliable and economical connections. Seniors would be less isolated. Veterans would have options for getting to medical clinics. Travelers on the roads would have improved safety at railroad crossings.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation analyzed the return on investment, and the Federal Railroad Administration reviewed the results. It's clear the benefits to Minnesotans exceed the cost to build this line.

To get NLX across the finish line, after 10 years of work, we need more people to lend their voices. Let's grow the grassroots support. Let your elected representatives at all levels of government know how you feel about transportation choices.

When the funding becomes available, NLX is ready to build.

Elissa Hansen is Duluth City Council president and NLX Alliance chairwoman.

About the NLX Alliance

The NLX Alliance is a group of government and community leaders from the 152-mile route between the Twin Ports and Twin Cities of the proposed Northern Lights Express, or NLX, passenger train. The train is to follow existing BNSF Railway tracks. The alliance was formed in 2007 and has completed initial data-driven studies. The Minnesota Department of Transportation has done environmental and preliminary engineering work since 2013. To learn more about the project, go to NorthernLightsExpress.org