



## News Release

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For Immediate Release

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### Weary summer travelers greeted by NLX passenger rail billboard 'Build it now!'

Ken Buehler was moving at about 15 miles per hour through a congested, one-lane stretch of construction zone on Interstate 35 near North Branch on a Sunday in July when he saw it—the new billboard for the proposed Northern Lights Express passenger rail project.

The billboard with the shiny Northern Lights Express locomotive states “Twin Cities to Duluth without the gas prices or congestion! Build it now!”

“People need to know there’s a passenger rail project ready to build that is an alternative to sitting in traffic,” said Buehler, who serves as the chair of the NLX Alliance Technical Advisory Committee. “I hope the billboard will encourage people to contact their legislators and say, ‘build it now!’”

Additional posters are appearing around Duluth. The NLX Alliance, a group of government entities and interested parties along the 152-miles of existing track, is sponsoring the boards.

Nick Katich, MN state legislative director for SMART-TD, a union of transportation workers, says the billboards are impacting people after just a few days.

#### **Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance**

Administrative Agency: St. Louis & Lake Counties Regional Railroad Authority  
Executive Director: Bob Manzoline, 111 Station 44 Road, Eveleth, MN 55734  
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“My folks have been commenting on the billboards,” Katich said. It’s no wonder people are interested, he adds, considering gas prices are at a 14-year high.

SMART-TD is one of several organizations that got behind the NLX proposal in the last legislative session. Katich thought things were looking good for NLX. The House passed \$85 million needed to unlock up to \$340 million in federal funds. But, like with so many other projects, time ran out on negotiations with the Senate.

The House bill provided enough funding to have people riding the train within three to four years, according to Buehler. And, he adds, the investment would be worthwhile for Minnesota.

Benefits of this project are many, beginning with the construction phase, where roughly 3,000 jobs will be created. Many people will work 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.

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 around stations 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.”

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.

### **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](http://NorthernLightsExpress.org).

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