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Local View: Businesses implore the Minnesota Legislature to invest in Northern Lights Express passenger rail

Efficient movement of goods, services and people, fuels our economy.



Three Locomotives powered Passenger Train /Getty Images

By Steve Cramer, Kristi Stokes, Lindsey Jacobson

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Business and transportation go together. Efficient movement of goods, services and people fuels our economy. That's why we, as leaders of business organizations representing nearly 300,000 workers and thousands of businesses of all sizes, implore the Minnesota Legislature to invest in Northern Lights Express passenger rail to connect our three cities.

Now is the time to act. An \$85 million commitment from the Legislature puts us in position to get up to \$340 million in federal dollars available through the new infrastructure investment and jobs act. That's what it will take to improve the existing tracks, which will immediately benefit freight movement, build or expand stations, and get trains running.

With NLX, people will have a reliable, affordable, safe choice to live, work and play in the downtowns of Minneapolis, Duluth and Superior. The suburbs and Greater Minnesota will benefit, too, with stations in Coon Rapids, Cambridge and Hinckley.

We want the fans of the Minnesota Twins, Timberwolves, Lynx and Vikings to be able to visit Minneapolis for a game by rail. That also goes for people who want to see a concert by the Minnesota Orchestra or any number of the other cultural offerings. We want an enjoyable trip to visit Duluth and Superior, a major regional tourism center, and our shared scenic treasure, the North Shore of Lake Superior.

We want students to comfortably work on assignments while they commute to the University of Minnesota campuses in Duluth or Minneapolis, or Anoka Ramsey Community College in Coon Rapids and Cambridge, or Pine Technical & Community College in Pine City, or University of Wisconsin-Superior, or the College of St. Scholastica.

Seniors, veterans and families will have transit support with NLX to live where they want and access amenities and services in our city centers.

NLX has passed all federal reviews and is ready to enter the construction phase — which will bring roughly 3,000 good-paying jobs. Studies have shown the return on investment will exceed the cost to get NLX up and running.

Increasing transportation choices is good for business. With federal funding now available, timing is crucial for the Minnesota Legislature to act this session. Let's get on board, Minnesota.

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