

January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Jill C Brown  
Northern Lights Express Alliance  
111 Station 44 Road  
Eveleth, MN 55734

Dear Jill,

We are writing you to express our strong support for the Northern Lights Express passenger rail proposal.

The Mpls Downtown Council is a member-supported business organization focused on creating an extraordinary downtown for all who live, work, play and explore our city. Downtown Minneapolis and its five neighborhoods are currently home to 216,000 workers and 57,000 residents while typically welcoming approximately 30 million visitors each year.

As a business-led organization focused on the largest downtown in the state of Minnesota, our enthusiasm for becoming a terminus for the Northern Lights Express (NLX) cannot be overstated. Beyond the global benefits this project will provide to our state in terms of investment and accessibility, there are three main connections behind this wholehearted support:

### **1. The connection between MSP Airport and Duluth**

Downtown Minneapolis benefits greatly from a strong light-rail connection to Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport. Minnesota's largest airport had nearly 15 million passengers in 2020 and the Metro Blue Line offers one of the most seamless, convenient connections from an international airport to a major downtown in the country. That transit link connects travelers directly to Target Field Station in downtown Minneapolis where NLX trains will depart for Duluth. NLX will leverage this existing infrastructure to connect some of the most popular destinations in our state with a high-quality service. The transfer point on this journey? Downtown Minneapolis, home to the largest concentration of hotel beds in the state, world-class dining and entertainment, and other amenities.

### **2. The connection between the Minneapolis-Saint Paul region and Duluth**

Motivated by a goal of leading the nation in transportation options, we have been advocating for new transit investments in our region for the past decade. Thanks to state and federal support, our downtown's strong growth over the timeframe has been accompanied and spurred by a series of high-quality, convenient transit connections between downtown and surrounding communities. These investments

have made Downtown Minneapolis the best-connected place for transit service in a region of 3.6 million people. The network effects that NLX would create for all of these places connected to our downtown by light rail, bus rapid transit, and commuter rail services are astounding. This is much more than a point-to-point connection - we are working with our partners in the public sector towards Downtown Minneapolis becoming a hub in a high-quality transit network that serves and benefits our metropolitan area, and those connections will also allow NLX to benefit the broader region.

### **3. The connection between Downtown Minneapolis and Duluth**

While self-interest is a factor in the first two reasons, it is front and center for the third - we want to take the Northern Lights Express! We want people who live, work, and play in Downtown Minneapolis to be able to visit Duluth and other cities along the route and vice versa. We want the fans of the Minnesota Twins, Timberwolves, Lynx, and Vikings in northern Minnesota to be able to visit Minneapolis for a game by rail, and the same goes for people who want to see a concert by the MN Orchestra, or any number of our other cultural offerings. We want it to be easy and convenient for our neighbors to visit Duluth, a major regional tourism center, and our state's scenic treasure, the North Shore of Lake Superior. We want students at the University of Minnesota from Northern Minnesota to be able to travel to and from school by train, and the same goes for students from Minneapolis attending the University of Minnesota Duluth. We want the number of trips between our city and Duluth to multiply and the connections between our communities to deepen without expanding congestion on the highways between us.

We see this as a major priority for our state and our local community and we will gladly add our voice to the chorus requesting that the state legislature prioritize funding for NLX in the upcoming session.



Steve Cramer  
mpls downtown council  
President & CEO