



Passenger Rail Office  
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395 John Ireland Boulevard  
St. Paul, MN 55155-1899

## MEMORANDUM

TO: EQB Distribution List  
Interested Parties

FROM: Francis Loetterle  
Project Manager

DATE: April 18, 2017

SUBJECT: NORTHERN LIGHTS EXPRESS PASSENGER RAIL  
TIER 2 PROJECT LEVEL ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
MINNEAPOLIS TO DULUTH, MINNESOTA  
STATE PROJECT TCP-NLX-12B

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), in cooperation with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT), is transmitting the enclosed Tier 2 Project Level Environmental Assessment (EA) for a proposed passenger rail service from Minneapolis to Duluth, known as the Northern Lights Express (NLX) service. The proposed project includes constructing the necessary infrastructure for, and operation of, an approximately 152-mile long, higher speed intercity passenger rail service between Minneapolis and Duluth, Minnesota, a portion of which will travel through Douglas County in Wisconsin, and that will reach speeds of up to 90 miles per hour. Stations are proposed in six communities: Minneapolis, Coon Rapids, Cambridge, Hinckley, and Duluth in Minnesota and Superior in Wisconsin. In addition, the proposed NLX Project would include one maintenance facility and one layover facility. These facilities may be on separate sites in Sandstone and Duluth, or co-located on one site in Duluth.

The Tier 2 EA documents the purpose and need of the project along with the anticipated social, economic, transportation, and environmental impacts. The Tier 2 EA addresses specific NLX Project-related issues and environmental effects associated with proposed NLX Project operations and construction, including track infrastructure, stations, and maintenance and layover facilities.

The Tier 2 EA includes documentation on the preliminary Section 106 findings regarding historic properties. The Tier 2 EA document also includes information on the Section 4(f) impacts and the preliminary *de minimis* findings, i.e., that adverse impacts to parks and recreation facilities and recreational trails would not result from the proposed project. Any comments received regarding this issue during the public comment period will be taken by the Federal Railroad Administration in making its final *de minimis* determination.

You are encouraged to provide substantive comments on the enclosed document. The Minnesota Environmental Quality Board 30-day comment period will begin upon publication of a Notice of Availability of the document in the EQB *Monitor* on April 24, 2017. The Tier 2 EA is available on the NLX Project website <http://www.mndot.gov/nlx>. Comments will be received through **May 24, 2017** and may be submitted via email at [nlx.dot@state.mn.us](mailto:nlx.dot@state.mn.us) or written comments may be directed to:

Francis Loetterle, Project Manager  
Minnesota Department of Transportation  
395 John Ireland Boulevard, MS 470  
Saint Paul, MN 55155-1800

The comments received will be used by MnDOT, FRA, and WisDOT in deciding whether there is potential for this project to result in significant impacts to the environment and whether an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required.

To afford an opportunity for all interested persons and agencies to comment on the proposed action, a public meeting will be held at the following locations:

- May 16, 2017 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Sandstone Senior Center, 206 Main Street in Sandstone, MN
- May 17, 2017 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Duluth Depot, 506 W. Michigan Street in Duluth, MN\*
- May 18, 2017 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Coon Rapids Civic Center, 11155 Robinson Drive NW in Coon Rapids, MN

The public meeting will be an informal open house format. MnDOT and consultant personnel will be available to provide specific information and individual assistance. The Tier 2 EA document along with maps, drawings, and supporting documents will be available for public viewing.

*\* The public meeting in Duluth will also serve as a public hearing to meet requirements under Wisconsin Administrative Code Chapter TRANS 400.11, Distribution and Review of Environmental Documents. The format and information provided at the Duluth meeting will be the same as the meetings in Sandstone and Coon Rapids.*

Thank you.

Enclosure: NLX Passenger Rail Tier 2 EA

cc: Garneth Peterson, MnDOT  
Caron Kloser, HNTB Corporation