



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Railroad
Administration**

EI-24564
FD 36052
CN

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

JUN 28 2016

Subject: Invitation to become a Cooperating Agency
Northern Lights Express (NLX) Tier 2 Project Level Environmental Assessment (EA)
Minneapolis to Duluth, Minnesota
Hennepin, Anoka, Isanti, Kanabec, Pine, Carlton and St. Louis counties in Minnesota and
Douglas County, Wisconsin

Dear Mr. Meyer;

This letter is to invite your agency to become a Cooperating Agency in the environmental process for the Northern Lights Express Tier 2 Project Level Environmental Assessment. The Northern Lights Express project proposes to provide passenger rail service between Minneapolis and Duluth, Minnesota and travels through Douglas County, Wisconsin. (see attached corridor map).

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is the lead federal agency in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) in the preparation of the Tier 2 Project Level Environmental Assessment. This undertaking is being conducted with cooperation from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) and the Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance. In 2013, FRA and MnDOT prepared a Tier 1 Service Level Environmental Assessment (EA) that evaluated impacts of the corridor as a whole, and resulted in the current preferred corridor for passenger rail service utilizing the BNSF corridor. The Tier 2 Project Level EA will incorporate preliminary engineering for the corridor and evaluate potential social, cultural, environmental and transportation-related impacts resulting from the NLX project. The Tier 2 EA must be completed before MnDOT can move forward with final design and seek funding for construction. The EA and decision documents are scheduled for completion in mid-2017.

The Northern Lights Express project proposes to provide passenger rail service between Target Field Station in Minneapolis to The Depot in Duluth. Stations will be located in Coon Rapids, Cambridge, Hinckley, and Superior, Wisconsin. The 152-mile corridor will utilize existing BNSF railroad track, with track, road crossing, and railroad bridge improvements. In addition to the station locations as listed above, there will be layover and maintenance facilities adjacent to the BNSF tracks in either Sandstone or in Duluth, MN. The operating plan calls for providing four round-trips daily, operating at a maximum speed of 90 mph. Further detail on the project is available at the NLX website:
<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/nlx>

As part of the NEPA process, we are contacting interested agencies to participate in the development of the Tier 2 EA. FRA and MnDOT envision the role of cooperating agencies to

- Participate in coordination meetings as appropriate; and

- Timely review and comment on the Tier 2 Environmental Assessment to reflect the views and concerns of your agency on the adequacy of the document, alternatives considered, and the anticipated impacts and mitigation.

Within 30 days of receipt of this letter, please send a written response (letter or email) to accept or decline this invitation to become a cooperating agency for the Northern Lights Express Tier 2 EA.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss the program or agency roles and responsibilities during the preparation of the environmental document, please contact Ms. Martin of my staff at 202-493-6201, or by email at andrea.martin@dot.gov.

Thank you for your cooperation and interest in this project.

Sincerely,



Michael Johnsen
Acting Division Chief
Environmental and Rail Planning Division
Federal Railroad Administration

Cc: Garneth Peterson, MnDOT Environmental Manager
Victoria Rutson, Office of Environmental Analysis, STB

FACILITY SITE LOCATIONS

DULUTH



 Union Depot



 + 
Area bounded by I-35, Railroad Street, Garfield Ave and Jeno's Walk

SUPERIOR



 Downtown

SANDSTONE



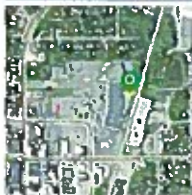
 + 
South of Oak St

HINCKLEY



 Downtown

CAMBRIDGE



 City Center

COON RAPIDS



 Foley Blvd

MINNEAPOLIS

 Target Field Station



KEY



Potential station site



Potential maintenance facility site



Potential layover facility site



**Northern Lights Express
(NLX) Corridor from
Target Field Station in
Minneapolis to The
Depot in Duluth, MN**

