



Northern Lights Express High Speed Passenger Rail Project from Minneapolis to Duluth, Minnesota

Environmental Assessment & Finding of No Significant Impact

The Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance (Alliance), in cooperation with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), proposes to construct the necessary infrastructure for, and to operate, an approximately 155-mile long, high-speed intercity passenger rail service between Minneapolis and Duluth, Minnesota. This service, known as the Northern Lights Express (NLX) service, would include eight round trips (16 trains) per day, operating at speeds up to 110 miles per hour. A portion of the service would travel through Douglas County in Wisconsin.

A Tier 1 Service Level Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared by MnDOT in consultation with the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), the Alliance and the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT). The EA was prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), FRA's Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts (64 FR 28545), Minnesota Statutes 116D, Wisconsin Statutes Section 1.11, Wisconsin Administrative Code, TRANS 400. The EA evaluates the service-wide environmental impacts of the proposed action and sets the foundation for subsequent Tier 2 or project level NEPA documentation.

This project has received grants from the High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR) Program in the amount of \$1.1 million, in addition to earmarks for \$500,000 and \$475,000. The completion of project level NEPA on discrete capital projects is required prior to the implementation of the proposed NLX service.

The Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is being made at the Tier 1 Level. The FONSI describes the purpose and need for the proposed project, alternatives considered, public and agency coordination, and environmental consequences and identified mitigation.

- [NLX Finding of No Significant Impact \(FONSI\)](#)
- [NLX FONSI Appendices](#)
- [NLX Programmatic Agreement](#)
- [NLX Programmatic Agreement Attachments](#)
- [NLX Environmental Assessment \(EA\)](#)
- [NLX EA Appendices](#)

Tier 2 Project Level Environmental Assessment

The FRA finds that the Tier 2 Project Level Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Northern Lights Express High Speed Passenger Rail Project from Minneapolis to Duluth, MN prepared by MnDOT, satisfies the requirements of FRA's Procedures for Considering Environmental Impacts (64 FR 28545, May 26, 1999) and NEPA (42 USC § 4321). The Project as presented in the EA would have no



foreseeable significant impact on the quality of the human or natural environment provided it is implemented in accordance with the commitments identified in the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) signed by FRA on February 20, 2018.

As the Project sponsor, MnDOT is responsible for ensuring all environmental commitments identified in the FONSI are fully implemented. The EA provides sufficient evidence and analysis for FRA to determine that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required for the Project as presented.

- [NLX Finding of No Significant Impact \(FONSI\)](#)

Tier 2 Project Level Environmental Assessment and Appendices

Files are in PDF format.

- [Cover, Signature Page, Executive Summary \(5.3 MB\)](#)
This file contains the cover, signature pages, and the executive summary of the NLX Tier 2 Project Level Environmental Assessment (EA).
- [Table of Contents, Acronyms and Abbreviations List \(212 KB\)](#)
This file includes the table of contents for the Tier 2 EA and the definitions of acronyms and abbreviations used throughout the Tier 2 EA.
- [Chapter 1 Purpose and Need \(605 KB\)](#)
Chapter 1 describes the NLX Project, including its location. Chapter 1 also provides background information on the NLX Project and discusses the purpose and need for the NLX Project.
- [Chapter 2 Alternatives \(8.5 MB\)](#)
Chapter 2 discusses the alternatives evaluated in the Tier 1 Service Level EA, proposed infrastructure improvements under Tier 2, and the No Build Alternative and the Build Alternative carried forward for analysis in the Tier 2 EA.
- [Chapter 3 Transportation \(3.8 MB\)](#)
Chapter 3 describes the existing transportation conditions in the NLX study area, the potential transportation impacts of the No Build Alternative and the Build Alternative, and the proposed avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures.
- [Chapter 4 Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences \(10.4 MB\)](#)
Chapter 4 describes the existing social, economic and environmental conditions in the NLX study area, the potential impacts of the No Build Alternative and the Build Alternative, and the proposed avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures.
- [Chapter 5 Public and Agency Involvement \(286 KB\)](#)
Chapter 5 describes the public and agency involvement activities that have been undertaken to date for the Tier 2 EA process, as well as a list of the permits and approvals that are anticipated to complete the NLX Project and the steps in the public review process that will occur to complete this Tier 2 EA and to prepare appropriate decision documents.
- [Chapter 6 References \(258 KB\)](#)
Chapter 6 lists all of the references, organized by chapter, cited in the Tier 2 EA.
- [Appendix A Environmental Assessment Worksheet \(EAW\) EA Reference Table and EA Form \(296 KB\)](#)
Appendix A includes a reference table identifying where in the Tier 2 EA the Minnesota



Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW) questions are addressed; the EAW form; and a table of the Sections, Townships, and Ranges that the NLX Project would pass through.

- [Appendix B Facilities Site Evaluation and Design Technical Memorandum \(56.6 MB\)](#)
Appendix B documents the current planning and design phase for the NLX station, maintenance and layover facilities being considered for the NLX Project. The report documents the analysis process, describes the required facility program elements, evaluates the facility site alternatives, and presents the conceptual design plans and cost estimates prepared for the selected NLX facility sites.
- [Appendix C Technical Documents in Support of NLX Service Plan \(10.6 MB\)](#)
Appendix C includes the following technical documents in support of the NLX service plan:
 - Preliminary Economic Impact Analysis, December 3, 2015
 - Preliminary Benefit Cost Analysis, December 3, 2015
 - Ridership and Revenue Forecast, October 2015
 - Capital Cost Report, January 2017
 - Operating and Maintenance Costs and Capital Replacement Forecast, January 2017
- [Appendix D Detailed Figures \(88.6 MB\)](#)
Appendix D presents detailed figures showing the NLX Project construction limits and resources present throughout the NLX study area.
- [Appendix E Build Alternative Design Information \(740 KB\)](#)
Appendix E includes typical cross sections, a table of proposed grade crossing improvements, and a table of proposed bridge and culvert improvements.
- [Appendix F Ridership Model Results \(1.3 MB\)](#)
Appendix F includes traffic circulation analysis tables identifying the vehicular trips added to the network for the AM and PM peaks in year 2040.
- [Appendix G Synchro Traffic Model Results \(1.4 MB\)](#)
Appendix G includes model results for the local street network near the proposed Cambridge NLX station, showing the existing PM peak traffic and the PM peak traffic with the addition of NLX riders.
- [Appendix H Bicycle, Pedestrian and Trails Information \(21.0 MB\)](#)
Appendix H provides bicycle, pedestrian and trails information for Minneapolis, Coon Rapids, Cambridge, Hinckley, and Duluth.
- [Appendix I Agency Coordination \(29.8 MB\)](#)
Appendix I includes documentation from agency coordination meetings, agency Tier 2 EA recommendations, and cooperating agency letters.
- [Appendix J Wetlands \(699 KB\)](#)
Appendix J includes detailed wetland GIS analysis methodology and a table of potential wetland impacts.
- [Appendix K Limited Phase I Environmental Site Assessment main document \(7.0 MB\)](#)
Appendix K provides the Limited Phase I Environmental Site Assessment conducted for the NLX Project.
- [Appendix K, Attachment A Site Figures \(2.1 MB\)](#)
Appendix K, Attachment A includes the figures for the Limited Phase I Environmental Site Assessment.
- [Appendix K, Attachment B, Part 1 \(74.6 MB\)](#)
Appendix K, Attachment B, Part 1 includes Environmental Data Resources Inc (EDR) reports and historical data for Target Field Station and Coon Rapids Station.



- [Appendix K, Attachment B, Part 2 \(47.7 MB\)](#)
Appendix K, Attachment B, Part 2 includes EDR reports and historical data for Cambridge Station; Hinckley Station; and Superior, Wisconsin Station.
- [Appendix K, Attachment B, Part 3 \(78.8 MB\)](#)
Appendix K, Attachment B, Part 3 includes EDR reports and historical data for Duluth Station and the Duluth maintenance and/or layover facility.
- [Appendix K, Attachment B, Part 4 \(92.8 MB\)](#)
Appendix K, Attachment B, Part 4 includes EDR reports and historical data for Sandstone Maintenance Facility and new bridge construction.
- [Appendix K, Attachment C \(5.6 MB\)](#)
Appendix K, Attachment C includes site photographs for the Limited Phase I Environmental Site Assessment.
- [Appendix K, Attachment D \(18.8 MB\)](#)
Appendix K, Attachment D includes signal upgrade and new bridge schematics for the Limited Phase I Environmental Site Assessment.
- [Appendix L Socioeconomic Census Data \(317 KB\)](#)
Appendix L presents detailed socioeconomic census data by census tract within the NLX Project study area.
- [Appendix M Inventory of Community Facilities \(345 KB\)](#)
Appendix M provides a list of community facilities by county that are located within the NLX Project study area.
- [Appendix N Environmental Justice Tables \(517 KB\)](#)
Appendix N presents tables that contain minority and low-income data for each census tract and community that are within or bisect the NLX Project study area.
- [Appendix O Public Involvement \(10.1 MB\)](#)
Appendix O includes public meeting summaries and published newsletters sent to NLX Project stakeholders.
- [Appendix P Cultural Resources \(7.0 MB\)](#)
Appendix P includes correspondence with the Minnesota Historic Preservation Office (MnHPO) and Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office (WisSHPO); the Programmatic Agreement among FRA, the Surface Transportation Board, Minnesota Department of Transportation, Wisconsin Department of Transportation, Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office (now MnHPO), and WisSHPO; and property location maps for properties listed on and eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places within the Area of Potential Effect for the NLX Project.
- [Appendix Q Draft Section 4\(f\) and Section 6\(f\) Evaluation \(524 KB\)](#)
Appendix Q presents the Draft Section 4(f) and Section 6(f) Evaluation, which analyzes the NLX Project impacts based on proposed construction limits that have been updated since the Tier 1 EA.

Other documents

- [Tier 1 Service Level Environmental Assessment](#)
- [MnDOT environmental coordination meeting presentation \(PDF, 5 MB\)](#)
- [Final NLX Phase I & II Architectural History Report - Vol. 1 \(PDF, 10 MB\)](#)
- [Final NLX Phase I & II Architectural History Report - Vol. 2 \(PDF, 55.67 MB\)](#)