



## Request for City Council Committee Action from the Department of Public Works

**Date:** August 19, 2014

**To:** Honorable Kevin Reich, Chair Transportation and Public Works Committee  
**Referral to:** Honorable John Quincy, Chair Ways and Means Committee

**Subject:** 2014 Northern Lights Express (NLX) Fees

### Recommendation:

Authorize \$12,500 to be expended from fund (00100 6000200) to allow City of Minneapolis 2014 participation in the Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance Board for the development of the Northern Lights Express.

### Previous Directives:

- January 6, 2014: Appoint Council Member John Quincy as the voting member on the NLX Board with Alondra Cano as the alternate voting member.
- April 16, 2013: Authorize \$12,500 to be expended from fund (00100 6000200) to allow 2013 City of Minneapolis participation in the Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance Board for the development of the Northern Lights Express.
- April 16, 2013: Approve the staff recommended comments on the Environmental Assessment for the Northern Lights Express (NLX) project and direct the Public Works Department to submit the comments to the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT)
- February 28, 2012: Authorize \$30,875 to be expended from fund (00100 6000200) to allow 2012 City of Minneapolis participation in the Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance Board for the development of the Northern Lights Express.
- November 4, 2011: Authorize the appropriate city officials to amend the Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance Joint Powers Agreement to allow for payment of these funds in 2011 and for subsequent years (2012 to 2016) when funding has been budgeted.
- November 4, 2011: Authorize \$38,000 to be expended from fund (04100-600100-507007) to allow 2011 City of Minneapolis participation in the Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance Board for the development of the Northern Lights Express.
- June 22, 2010: Authorize \$48,000 to be expended from fund (04100-600100-507007) to allow 2011 City of Minneapolis participation in the Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance Board for the development of the Northern Lights Express.
- April 28, 2009: Authorize \$50,000 to be expended from fund (04100-600100-507007) to allow 2009 City of Minneapolis participation in the Minneapolis-

Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance Board for the development of the Northern Lights Express.

- January 22, 2008: Approved funding for the city's portion of the rail study in the amount of \$57,750.
- January 22, 2008: Authorize city officials to enter into the Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance Joint Powers Agreement.

### Department Information

Prepared by: Donald Pflaum, P.E., P.T.O.E., PW Transportation Planner 673-2129

Approved by: \_\_\_\_\_  
Steven A. Kotke, P.E., Director of Public Works

Presenters in Committee: Donald Pflaum PW Transportation Planner 673-2129

### Financial Impact

- Action is within current department budget.

### Community Impact

- City Goals – This project supports the following city goals:
  - A hub of economic activity and innovation: Businesses – big and small – start, move, stay and grow here.
  - Living well: Minneapolis is safe and livable and has an active and connected way of life. High-quality and convenient transportation options connect every corner of the city.
- Comprehensive Plan - Supports Comprehensive Plan Goals

### Supporting Information

The Northern Lights Express is a proposed 155 mile long, high-speed passenger rail line between Minneapolis and Duluth with speeds up to 110 miles per hour. Passenger trains will operate on an existing freight corridor owned by Burlington Northern Sante Fe (BNSF). Travel times are estimated to be just over 2 hours between Minneapolis and Duluth with additional proposed stations in Coon Rapids, Cambridge, Hinckley, and Superior.

In January 2008 the City Council authorized the City of Minneapolis to enter into the Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance. As part of this action the City agreed to contribute \$57,750 toward the 2008 Rail Alliance budget. The City Council took action to pay \$50,000 in 2009, \$48,000 in 2010, \$38,000 in 2011, \$30,875 in 2012, and \$12,500 in 2013. Since the Joint Powers Agreement did not specify annual payments after 2008, this action is needed to continue membership on the Joint Powers Board. An effort was made to simplify the process in 2011 by the City Council authorizing an amendment to the Joint Powers agreement allowing for annual payments to be made when funds are budgeted. However, specific funding was not earmarked in the 2014 budget for this project. There is sufficient funding in the Public Works operating budget (00100 6000200) to cover this expense.

The 2014 contribution has been calculated to be \$12,500. In 2012 the Alliance chose to start allocating some of its reserve funding to pay for future expenses, therefore reducing membership fees for local communities.

**Project Status**

In 2013 the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) issued a "Finding of No Significant Impact" (FONSI), which allowed the project to enter the preliminary engineering phase of development. The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) has now taken the lead on the project and has hired a number of consultants to assist with the work. Preliminary engineering will continue into 2014 and 2015 using federal and state funds that have already been secured. Preliminary engineering will identify where track improvements are needed, potential locations for an operations and maintenance facility, and where at-grade crossings need improvement. The preliminary engineering process will also refine the ridership projections and cost estimates for the corridor. Additional federal and state funds will need to be appropriated before final engineering and construction can take place. Based on the experience of other passenger rail projects throughout the nation, this project will take 3-4 years after funding has been granted to complete construction and begin service.

Attachment #1 – Map of Corridor

Attachment #2 – PowerPoint Presentation

cc: CM Quincy – NLX Board Member  
CM Cano – NLX Board Alternate