DULUTH UNION DEPOT
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES RE-EVALUATION
DULUTH, ST. LOUIS COUNTY, MINNESOTA

MnDOT Agreement No. 1000364
Summit Project No. 1727-0046

Authorized and Sponsored by:
Minnesota Department of Transportation
Federal Railroad Administration

Prepared by:
Summit Envirosolutions, Inc.
1217 Bandana Boulevard North
St. Paul, Minnesota 55108

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Principal Investigator and Author: Andrew J. Schmidt

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 MANAGEMENT SUMMARY

The Northern Lights Express (NLX) is a proposed high speed passenger rail project that would provide rail service between Minneapolis and Duluth. If constructed, NLX would operate on approximately 152 miles of an existing BNSF railroad corridor. The project has received funding from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), and must comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and its implementing regulations (36 CFR 800). As part of its responsibilities on behalf of FRA regarding Section 106, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) Cultural Resources Unit (CRU) has identified and evaluated historic properties that may be affected by this project. One of those properties, the former Duluth Union Depot (Depot), is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and is adjacent to the proposed Duluth NLX station. The Depot was identified as a historic property within the Area of Potential Effects for the NLX project during a previous architecture-history survey (The 106 Group 2013).

Because the Depot was listed in the NRHP in 1971 and aspects of the listing were not specified, the CRU contracted with Summit Envirosolutions, Inc. to complete a clarifying re-evaluation of the listed property, per 36 CFR 800.4(c)(1). The intent of this report is to identify the property boundaries, period of significance and what buildings or structures are contributing to the 1971 Duluth Depot nomination. This report is intended to provide guidance for any future consultation regarding the NLX Project or other projects and potential effects on the historic Depot.

The Depot is located in the NW ¼ of the SE ¼ of the SW ¼ of Section 27, T50N, R14W. In 1971, 2.7 acres including the Depot building and associated structures were conveyed to St. Louis County and converted into the St. Louis County Heritage and Arts Center. The re-evaluation study addressed the Depot building, the 2.7 acres owned by St. Louis County, and the railroad yards to the south, which were historically associated with the railroad station area of the Depot. The survey area of the re-evaluation study comprises 12.8 acres (5.2 hectares). The UTM coordinates (NAD 83) for the Depot are: Zone 15; Easting 568390.27; Northing 5181257.43.

Andrew Schmidt served as Principal Investigator for the study. The field work was conducted on April 19 and 20, 2015. Standard architectural history field methods were utilized to document the Depot and its setting, including architectural descriptions and digital photographs. As a result of the re-evaluation, it is recommended that the NRHP-listed property is the Depot building itself but does not include any of the adjacent buildings or structures that were associated with the Depot and railroad station or that have been constructed since 1971. Furthermore, this re-evaluation concluded that the building was intended to be listed under Criterion C, for its architectural design, with a period of significance of 1892.
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Northern Lights Express (NLX) is a proposed high speed passenger rail project that would provide rail service between Minneapolis and Duluth. If constructed, NLX will operate on approximately 152 miles of an existing BNSF railroad corridor. The project has received funding from the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA), and must comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and its implementing regulations (36 CFR 800). As part of its responsibilities on behalf of FRA regarding Section 106, the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) Cultural Resources Unit (CRU) has identified and evaluated historic properties that may be affected by this project. One of those properties, the former Duluth Union Depot (Depot), is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and is adjacent to the proposed Duluth NLX station (Figure 1).

The Duluth NLX station is proposed to be located on the site of the former Amtrak station, behind the historic Depot building, at railroad grade level. The main connection with regard to the historic Depot will be a new entry, which is conceptually designed to be modern in appearance. The new entry is planned to be located near the northeast corner of the historic Depot between the building and the 5th Avenue Bridge and is sited to allow riders to enter the NLX station without entering the Depot.

Although the Depot is listed in the NRHP, it was listed in 1971, and the nomination form did not address issues such as property boundaries, period of significance, and whether other associated buildings and structures associated with the railroad station area were contributing or non-contributing to the nomination. In order to clarify the nature of the historic property for the purposes of consultation with the Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office (MnSHPO), the CRU contracted with Summit Envirosolutions, Inc. (Summit) to complete a re-evaluation of the Depot. A clarifying re-evaluation of a listed property is allowable per 36 CFR 800.4(c)(1) because the original NRHP nomination was an “incomplete prior evaluation” that did not define the property boundaries or the features that contribute to the property’s historic characteristics.

During the re-evaluation study, Summit and CRU staff met with MnSHPO staff twice to discuss the Depot, on June 25 and October 1, 2015. The first meeting was to discuss the NLX project in relation to the Depot and the questions regarding the Depot, including property boundaries, contributing elements, and period of significance. At the second meeting Summit’s preliminary recommendations were discussed, and attendees agreed on the approach to this re-evaluation of the property.

The Depot is located in the NW ¼ of the SE ¼ of the SW ¼ of Section 27, T50N, R14W. In 1971, 2.7 acres including the Depot building and associated structures were conveyed to St. Louis County and converted into the St. Louis County Heritage and Arts Center. The re-evaluation study addressed the Depot building, the 2.7 acres owned by St. Louis County, and the railroad yards to the south, which were historically associated with the railroad station area of the Depot. The survey area of the re-evaluation study comprises 12.8 acres (5.2 hectares). The UTM coordinates (NAD 83) for the Depot are: Zone 15; Easting 568390.27; Northing 5181257.43.
Figure 1. Project Location
2.0 METHODS

2.1 Objectives

The Depot was identified as a historic property within the Area of Potential Effects for the NLX project during a previous architecture-history survey (The 106 Group 2013). Because the Depot is listed in the NRHP, typically this would be sufficient to define a historic property for the purposes of Section 106. The property, however, was listed in 1971, and according to the standards for NRHP nominations at that time, the Description and Statement of Significance in the nomination form were extremely brief and did not address issues such as property boundaries, period of significance, and whether other buildings and structures associated with the Depot and railroad station were contributing or non-contributing to the nominated property. As a result, it was not clear if the listing includes the Depot building itself, the property currently owned by St. Louis County, or the property formerly owned by the Union Depot and Terminal Company. Furthermore, it was not clear which, if any, buildings and structures beyond the Depot building are contributing to the historic property. Due to these ambiguities, the potential effects on the historic property could not be adequately assessed.

In consultation with MnSHPO staff, two main options were discussed for addressing the potential effects of the NLX project on the Depot. The first option was to undertake a full re-evaluation of the NRHP eligibility of the Depot and preparation of a new NRHP nomination, per 36 CFR 800.4(c)(1). A full evaluation opened up questions regarding the property’s historic integrity due to changes over the past 45 years that could have affected the property’s eligibility status. The second option was to accept that the Depot is listed but to clarify the period of significance, the appropriate boundaries of the historic property, and the contributing and non-contributing elements.

It was agreed that the second option was preferred and that MnDOT, with assistance from Summit, would clarify the historic property boundaries in order to assess the effects of new construction adjacent to the historic property, which is primarily significant for its architecture. A clarifying re-evaluation of a property listed in the NRHP is allowable per 36 CFR 800.4(c)(1) because the original NRHP nomination was an “incomplete prior evaluation” that did not define the property boundaries or the features that contribute to the property’s historic characteristics.

2.2 Methods

Summit staff completed background research at the MnSHPO, the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) library, the Duluth Public Library, and the Northeast Historical Center at the University of Minnesota, Duluth. Sources reviewed during the background research include the previous NRHP nomination form for the Depot, previous cultural resources studies, and other secondary sources regarding Duluth history, as well as the statewide Multiple Property Documentation Form, “Railroads in Minnesota, 1862-1956” (Railroads MPDF) (Schmidt et al. 2007). These sources were used to develop historic contexts regarding railroads and Duluth and the development of the Depot. In addition, staff completed primary source research regarding the Depot. Particularly useful were the
corporate records of the Union Depot and Terminal Company in the Northern Pacific Railway corporate records archived at the MHS library. In addition, historic maps depicting the station area of the Depot, as well as a 1928 study of Duluth’s railroad facilities, provided valuable information. The Railroads MPDF provided useful contexts regarding the railroad companies and their significance.

Summit conducted an intensive-level survey of the exterior and interior of the Depot in order to assess its current condition and historic integrity. This survey also covered the former railroad station area, including the railroad yard to the southwest of the Depot. Field documentation of the Depot and station area consisted of detailed written descriptions and digital photographs.

This study used the research and field survey results to guide the assessment of boundaries and contributing elements, which can be used to determine potential effects of the NLX project on the historic property. In addition, the more detailed physical description and historical background will inform future studies and assessments of effect for any projects in the Depot area.
3.0 RESULTS

3.1 Description

Constructed during 1891-1892, the Duluth Union Depot (Depot) is located on West Michigan Street between South 5th Avenue West and South 6th Avenue West in downtown Duluth (Figure 2). Note: downtown Duluth is oriented to the Lake Superior waterfront, and therefore, the streets are not aligned to the ordinal directions. The Depot building is located on a 2.7-acre parcel that is owned by St. Louis County and that also includes a 1977 addition, a train shed reconstructed in 1975, three canopy shelters from 1924, and six stub-end tracks. To the southwest of the county-owned property, a railroad yard formerly associated with the Depot and now owned by BNSF Railway consists of multiple yard tracks with signals and switches, a raised concrete parking deck, and corrugated metal maintenance buildings. Michigan Street is on the northwest side of the Union Depot, 5th Avenue is on the northeast side, and the train shed is attached to the southeast elevation. Directly to the east of the train shed, one through track runs on BNSF right of way. Elevated on a concrete box-girder structure, I-35 runs on a northeast-southwest alignment to the east of the railroad right of way. The Depot fronts on Michigan Street, with a secondary elevation facing 5th Avenue.

The Depot parcel slopes toward Lake Superior, and the Depot building was built into the slope so that the Michigan Street (northwest) side accesses the first floor and the train shed (southeast) side enters at the basement level. The Michigan Street frontage is concrete-paved for sidewalk, and ornamental trees are planted near the corners. A freestanding sign identifies the building as “The Depot.” To account for the slope and to cross over I-35 to the southeast, 5th Avenue is elevated along the northeast side of the Depot. The train shed is attached to the southeast elevation of the Depot, and the addition is attached to the southwest.

The Depot building retains integrity of location and design – the building remains in its original location, and the French Renaissance Revival inspired design is readily apparent, especially on the Michigan Street elevation. Additions to the Depot building include the 1977 performing arts wing, the circa 1970 Amtrak shed, and the train shed that was reconstructed in 1975. The train shed, though not historic, is in keeping with the original train shed. The Amtrak shed is below the 5th Avenue and I-35 overpasses at track level and is only visible from the east corner of the Depot. The Performing Arts Wing, which extends off of the southwest corner, is both compatible with the Depot due to its similar materials and scale, and distinguishable due to its Modernist design. The Depot building retains partial integrity of materials and workmanship. The wall materials and many of the interior finishes are intact, and although window sashes and doors have been replaced, the openings are intact. The chimneys above the roofline and the roof creasing have been removed. The southwest exterior wall has been altered to accommodate the performing arts wing, but historically, a wing projected from this wall. The integrity of feeling and association has been diminished to a degree by the conversion to office and museum space; however, the Depot building retains proximity to railroad tracks, and key spaces retain integrity, including the great hall/waiting room, immigrant waiting room,
stairway leading to the track level, and platforms. As a result, the building retains the overall feeling and association of a railroad depot.

The setting of the Depot has been altered due to the construction of the I-35 and 5th Avenue overpasses and the raised parking deck to the southwest, all of which have circumscribed the property. In addition, the 1980 Public Library, located across Michigan Street, the 1970 Radisson Hotel, and other buildings have replaced historic-period buildings surrounding the Depot.

Historically, the Depot and associated structures and tracks were owned by the Duluth Union Depot and Transfer Company (later Northern Pacific), encompassing an area extending from West Michigan Street southeast to an area now occupied by I-35 and from South 5th Avenue West southwest to a point between 10th Avenue West and 11th Avenue West. Currently, the Depot is within a parcel owned by St. Louis County that is bounded by Michigan Street, 5th Avenue, an active railroad line, and the former 6th Avenue right of way. It has been known as the St. Louis County Heritage and Arts Center since acquisition by the County.

Due to the alterations to the historic setting of the Depot, the former railroad station area does not have potential to be a railroad station historic district, as distinguished by the MPDF Railroads in Minnesota, 1862-1956 (Schmidt et al. 2007: F-230). Of note, a raised parking deck visually and physically separates the Depot from a formerly associated rail yard and other support structures to the southwest. The parking deck is an element that was not associated with the Depot and its station area, and furthermore, simply would not have existed in any railroad station. In addition to the visual and physical break between the Depot and the rail yard, a corrugated metal maintenance building and a surface parking lot encroach on the former station area. Other historic-period buildings and structures associated with the railroad station are no longer extant, including portions of the platform canopies, a section house, tool houses, a blacksmith shop, and yard tracks. For these reasons, the railroad station area associated with the Depot lacks historic integrity, and a railroad station historic district is not present.

Although the railroad yard to the southwest of the Depot is extant, the area does not have potential to be a railroad yard historic district. The trackage within the railroad yard historically was associated with the Depot railroad station and did not function independently from the station operations. Therefore, the railroad yard does not have potential significance separate from the Depot railroad station, and because a railroad station historic district is not present, as discussed above, the railroad yard would not contribute to the NRHP-listed property.

**Exterior**

The Depot is a multi-level building built into a slope, and it consists of a track level and a second floor below the elevation of Michigan Street, as well as the main level at Michigan Street and a fourth floor above. It is a rectangular-plan building consisting of a high-pitched hip-roofed central massing flanked by massive turrets and hip-roofed wings. The primary exterior materials are a sandstone foundation, cream-color Chaska brick
walls, and Bedford (Indiana) limestone trim. The windows have replacement aluminum sashes that are fit within the original openings.

The primary façade of the building is the northwest elevation, which faces Michigan Street. This elevation is symmetrically arranged with a three-bay center section flanked by the turrets and two-bay wings. A gable-roofed canopy that extends out from the center section is supported on iron posts with concrete footings and has an iron panel at the pediment with eight fleur de lis motifs cut into the iron. In addition, a shed-roofed canopy wraps around the southern turret. The first floor of the center section has three round-arched openings: a main entrance flanked by windows, each of which have a limestone surround with diamond motifs. A projecting limestone stringcourse extends across this section at a height of 7 feet. The entry bay includes four replacement aluminum-and-glass doors and a four-light transom, and each window opening has four fixed-sashes and a four-light transom. On the second floor, three sets of paired single-sash windows with two-light transoms all have limestone surrounds. Directly above the middle window set, a gable-roofed dormer is elaborately adorned with limestone, including Ionic-motif pilasters, a dentilled cornice, an enclosed pediment surrounding a circular shell motif with the letter “D” (for Duluth), and finials. The turrets have three window sets on each floor that are similar to those in the center section but with Ionic-motif pilasters flanking each window. Below each window, there is a basement-level, two-light fixed-sash window. The turrets are topped with “witch’s hat” roofs, each with a finial. The Michigan Street façade of each wing has a single and a paired window set similar to those in the center section; the windows on the southern wing, however, only have limestone sills and lintels.

The northeast elevation, which faces 5th Avenue, has three bays: a paired window set flanked by single windows, each with a single fixed sash with a two-light transom and limestone surrounds. A lower-level (mezzanine) window is located below each window. A hip-roofed dormer has a band of four two-over-one sash windows with limestone surrounds. At the east corner of this elevation, a hip-roofed entry bay provides access to the mezzanine and track levels. This bay has two round-arched openings with glass-and-aluminum doors and transoms, and coffered eave overhangs. A flat-roofed wing, built for Amtrak service in 1970, extends to the southeast. This wing has a brick wall on its northeast elevation, and on the southeast, the wall is wood with a row of glass-and-aluminum fixed-sash windows with wood bulkhead panels. There is also a vehicle entry with an overhead roll-up door.

The southwest elevation, which faces the former 6th Avenue (the street and viaduct have been removed, but the right of way is intact), is three bays like the northeast elevation. The Duluth Playhouse, a 1977 brick and concrete addition with a modern curvilinear design, is attached to the center and east bays via a single-story wing (with an exposed lower level on the track side). The wing has a glass-and-aluminum curtain wall on the west facing Michigan Street. This addition replaced a historic period wing. The exposed bay on the southwest elevation of the Depot has a paired window set with limestone sills and lintels and fixed single-sash windows with transoms. A hip-roofed dormer has a band of four two-over-one sash windows with limestone surrounds.
The southeast elevation, which faces the tracks, has multiple levels: the track and second levels are covered by the train shed, and the main (Michigan Street) and fourth levels are exposed. These levels have a five-bay center section flanked by three-bay wings. The main level has a series of round-arched windows with limestone sills and paired one-over-one sash windows with transoms. The upper-level center section includes three sets of paired one-over-one sash windows, each with a limestone sill and lintel and separated by a brick pilaster, and transoms with a limestone lintel. In addition, rectangular openings with limestone sills and lintels and three-light fixed sash flank the paired window sets. One of the window-transom combinations and one of the rectangular windows have been infilled. The north wing has the hip-roofed entry bay attached to it, as well as a hip-roofed wall dormer with a pair of three-light fixed sash with limestone sills and lintels. The south wing has round arched windows on the main level and a hip-roofed wall dormer, though all of the window openings have been infilled.

**Interior**
The interior of the Depot has multiple levels: the track level and a second floor, both of which are below the Michigan Street grade; a mezzanine level; the Michigan Street level, which is the primary interior space; and a fourth floor.

The Michigan Street level is organized around a great hall, with hallways accessing flanking wings, which are divided into office spaces, and a grand stairway in the east corner. The great hall is a two-story space and has heavy timber trusses and frames supporting the roof, a brownstone floor with marble trim, and brick walls that are painted white. Modern globe lights are attached to the roof trusses. The great hall accesses Michigan Street via an arched entrance, and arched windows open onto the street (see above). Interior arches and partition walls just inside the entrance form a vestibule. A projecting stone band runs along the walls at a height of seven feet, and a second projecting stone band runs between the third and fourth floor levels. The upper, or fourth floor, level is punctuated by three window openings, each with two single fixed-sashes with two-light transoms and wood surrounds. On the southwest wall, a pair of arched entries flanks a red brick fireplace. The entry openings have modern doors consisting of anodized aluminum and glass and have glass and aluminum transoms fit in the arches. Upper level windows are located above each arch and are similar to the Michigan Street elevation. On the southwest side of the great hall, a room (the former ticket office) extends from the interior wall under the balcony serving the fourth floor. The former ticket windows have been infilled with mahogany wood panels. The areas on both sides of this room are open under the balcony, with round arched window openings and a brick elevator shaft at the northeast corner of the room. The balcony is supported by three riveted girders with round floral designs on inset face panels. The northeast wall is similar to the southwest, with round-arched entries flanking a brick fireplace. However, at the northeast corner, a stairway leads down to the second floor and track levels.

The great hall is flanked by the turreted wings, which currently house office and exhibition spaces. The northeast wing is accessed via a hallway with round-arched entries on both ends and round-arched window openings, and a brownstone with marble trim floor similar to the great hall. The office and exhibition spaces retain numerous
round-arched window and entry openings. Replacement window sashes fit into the original openings, and many of the doors are wood with a glass panel. The southwest wing is similar to the northeast, with a hallway accessing office and exhibit spaces. Along the southeast wall of this wing, there is a pair of modern restrooms, and a stairwell leads down to the second level. On the southwest wall, an arched opening leads to the performing arts addition. In both wings, some partition walls have been added and some minor elements have been added or replaced, such as carpeting and lighting.

The fourth floor is generally open above the great hall, except for the balcony, but has office and gallery space over the wings. In addition to the elevator in the great hall, the fourth floor is accessed via stairs off the hall in the northeast wing. The balcony, which connects the wings, is open to the great hall and has a railing with metal posts and wood rail. The windows in the balcony are similar to those in the upper level of the great hall, and open round-arched entries provide access to the wings. The wings have been subdivided with modern partition walls and doors.

The stairway at the northeast corner of the great hall leading to the lower levels has concrete double-loaded stairs with a metal center rail and is lined with round-arched window openings with pairs of fixed sashes and three-light transoms in the arches. The stairway is accessed from the great hall via a round-arched entry with two sets of double doors (wood with a glass panel) and a four-light transom in the arch.

The lower levels of the depot consist of a track level, which because the Depot is built into a slope, is the lowest level, and a second floor above it. Each level is subdivided into office and exhibition space on the wings, and at the center below the great hall, the former baggage handling area is open to both levels. Although much of the second floor has been reconfigured with partition walls, the area at the bottom of the stairs leading from the great hall, known as the “immigrant waiting room,” retains good integrity. This area consists of a waiting room and a separate room formerly used for showers and has concrete floors and glazed tile walls. A hallway leads from this area to a partially open balcony overlooking the former baggage handling area. The balcony has round-arched openings in the brick walls, which offer views to the area below. The baggage handling area has been converted to a small theater with a stage and stadium type seating, but the open configuration of the room remains. The area below the southwest wing has been reconfigured with partition walls, and modern carpeting, lighting, and drop ceilings have been added. This area includes a stairwell that provides access up to the main level and down to the track level.

A secondary entrance to the Depot is located in the northeast corner of the second floor. From the entry bay, a hallway leads to a stairway to the track level and an entrance to the second floor, which has two sets of glass-and-aluminum double doors with transoms and separated by a concrete pillar with decorative panels. Concrete stairs lead down to the track level.

The track level of the Depot is configured much like the second floor. There are two entry points, each at one of the wings, leading directly from the track platform area. Like
the second floor, the wings have both been reconfigured with partition walls and
appointed with modern carpeting, drop ceilings, lighting, and doors and windows. At the
center is the former baggage handling area, as described above.

The reconstructed enclosed train shed is attached to the southeast side of the Depot. This
1975 structure is similar to the original train shed in scale and massing, but is
differentiated in materials (vertical board siding) and roof type (three low gables). Six
sets of tracks enter the train shed via three double swinging doors, and the tracks are
paired on three center platforms, which are level with the tracks and are constructed of
brick pavers with concrete curbs. The exterior of the Depot within the train shed has
been altered through the addition of false storefronts.

3.2 Historical Background

Railroads and the Development of Duluth

Duluth is a well-known port city at the head of Great Lakes navigation. Historically,
however, Duluth was as much a railroad city as it was a port city: being at the head of
Great Lakes shipping meant that Duluth served as a transfer point between modes of
transportation. Without railroad connections, the harbor at Duluth, Minnesota, and
Superior, Wisconsin, had potential but limited opportunity. When the Lake Superior and
Mississippi railroad reached Duluth in 1870 and the Northern Pacific began building
westward that same year, the potential began to be realized.

The Duluth-Superior Harbor is located within the St. Louis Bay of Lake Superior and is
protected by the Minnesota Point sandbar. Completion of the canal and locks at Sault Ste.
Marie, Michigan, connecting Lakes Superior and Huron in 1855, opened up Lake
Superior shipping to the Atlantic Ocean via the Erie Canal. With its natural harbor and
location at the western end of the Great Lakes, the St. Louis Bay was a natural site for a
future city. Numerous townsites were platted in the area, and along with the established
town of Superior, settlements reached a population of about 2,000 in early 1857. This
rapid growth was short lived, however, as the Panic of 1857 decimated Great Lakes
shipping, and most of the residents of the Duluth-Superior settlements left the area (Beck

The Duluth-Superior settlements did not fully recover until 1870. During the late 1860s,
the Lake Superior and Mississippi (LS&M, later St. Paul and Duluth) railroad built its
main line from St. Paul to Duluth, thus connecting by rail the heads of Great Lakes and
Mississippi River shipping. In addition, in 1870, the Northern Pacific railroad began
construction west from a junction with the LS&M railroad just west of Duluth. This
construction, along with improvements to the harbor, had an immediate impact on
Duluth’s population. From a handful of residents in 1869, the population of Duluth
jumped to 3,500 by the summer of 1870 (Beck and Labadie 2004: 38-43; Eubank 1991:
17-18).

After railroads connected the Duluth-Superior harbor with farmlands to the south and
west, grain shipments through the harbor expanded dramatically, and the population
continued growing as well, surpassing 5,000 people in Duluth by 1873. Although the
Panic of 1873 and ensuing economic depression caused Duluth’s population to drop by two-thirds, the city began to recover by the late 1870s. Fed by the Red River Valley’s bonanza wheat farms, Northern Pacific railroad shipments of wheat to the Duluth-Superior harbor increased more than five-fold from the late 1870s to the early 1880s. This increase in grain shipments led to the construction of 11 new grain elevators on the east side of Rice’s Point in Duluth by 1885. Meanwhile, the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha (Omaha) railroad and the Eastern Railway of Minnesota (later Great Northern) completed lines in 1883 and 1888, respectively, to the Superior side of the harbor (and later connected directly to Duluth via bridges) (Beck and Labadie 2004: 47-52; Eubank 1991: 19-21).

If wheat shipments fueled development of a thriving Duluth-Superior harbor by the mid 1880s, iron ore transformed the harbor into one of the busiest in the United States. During the 1880s, Charlemagne Tower began mining operations in the Vermillion Iron Range, built the Duluth and Iron Range railroad to Two Harbors, and then extended the railroad to Duluth. Development of the Vermillion Range was only the beginning; in 1889 the Mesabi Iron Range, the largest of the Lake Superior ranges was discovered. During the early 1890s, the Merritt family, along with outside investors, built the Duluth, Missabe and Northern railroad, began mining operations, and developed an ore dock in Duluth (Beck and Labadie 2004: 62-68; Eubank 1991: 21). During the mid to late 1890s, steel production in Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and other cities created a seemingly insatiable demand for iron ore. To meet the demand, mining companies increased production, additional railroad lines were extended into the Mesabi Range, and ore docks were expanded on the Duluth-Superior harbor. The Great Northern, Duluth Missabe and Northern, Duluth and Iron Range, Minneapolis St. Paul and Sault Ste. Marie (Soo Line), and Northern Pacific railroads all expanded their presence on the iron ranges and funneled immense volumes of iron ore to the Duluth-Superior harbor (Prosser 1966: 42).

In addition to wheat and iron ore, lumber further fueled Duluth’s growth. By the 1880s, lumbermen were drawn to the pine forests of northern Minnesota. Timber flowed from the forests to the Duluth-Superior waterfront, where it was milled and readied for shipment. The influx of logs led to construction and expansion of mills in Duluth and Superior such that milled lumber increased from 10 million board feet in 1885 to 150 million board feet in 1890. Massive new lumber mills were built on the harbor during the 1890s (Beck and Labadie 2004: 78). In order to reach the more remote timber stands, logging companies transported the cut logs via railroads to the sawmill sites. Logging companies ran feeder lines to the new branches and mains of the Soo Line, Great Northern, and Northern Pacific that crisscrossed the region between Duluth and the Red River Valley.

The railroads not only hauled commodities to Duluth’s harbor, they connected the growing city with a broader transportation network. With expansion of northern railroads, by the 1890s, Minnesota’s transportation network had transformed from several pioneer lines to many overlapping grids that connected all of southern Minnesota, the Red River Valley, and Duluth-Superior to the larger national transportation network. Three sets of overlapping lines now spread across the state, one of which was centered on
the Duluth-Superior Harbor. Spreading out like spokes from a hub, railroads connected Duluth to the iron ranges, northern forests, Red River Valley, and Minneapolis-St. Paul. By the 1890s, seven railroads served Duluth, including: North Pacific; St. Paul and Duluth; Great Northern; Duluth Missabe and Northern; Duluth and Iron Range; Soo Line; Omaha; and Wisconsin Central.

By the early 1890s, with commodities flowing through the port and railroads connecting the city to a broad transportation network, Duluth had grown rapidly and was poised for continued growth. Between 1880 and 1890, the city population grew from 3,300 to just over 33,000; this figure would reach nearly 53,000 by the turn of the century and would exceed 100,000 during the 1920s. With this population growth, Duluth became a commercial and civic center. By the early 1890s, the city was served by 16 banks, eight building and loan associations, 100 saloons, 42 churches, and 34 schools. The Duluth Jobbers Union was formed to develop wholesale and manufacturing interests in the city, and the Duluth Board of Trade, formed in 1881, provided a market for trading commodities. In addition, during the late 1880s and early 1890s, a number of major civic, cultural, and commercial buildings were constructed, including the City Hall and Jail buildings (1889, NRHP 1986); the Masonic Temple Opera Block (1889, NRHP 2006); the Spaulding Hotel (1889, razed); the Lyceum Theater (1891, razed); the Central High School (1892, NRHP 1972), and the 12-story Torrey Building (1892) (Koop and Morris 2006: E–13-16). Within this context of growth and development, a new union depot was planned for Duluth to replace the original union depot, built in 1870.

Development of the Duluth Union Depot
By 1870, Duluth had a railroad connection to St. Paul via the LS&M railroad, and the Northern Pacific railroad had begun building its proposed transcontinental line westward from a connection with the LS&M just west of Duluth. Envisioning rapid growth in railroad traffic and for the city, in 1870 Duluth’s two railroads built a shared depot, or union depot at 5th Avenue and Michigan Street. This building was a two-story wood-frame building with two rooms on the main floor. As described above, the Panic of 1873 hit Duluth hard, and the small depot was adequate through the 1870s.

As described above, Duluth experienced rapid growth during the 1880s and, by the end of the decade, had transformed from a small city on the edge of the frontier to a rapidly expanding transportation and commercial hub. As a result, new residents as well as travelling businessmen, salesmen, and workers flocked to Duluth, seeking economic opportunities or passing through on the way to the iron ranges and forests. Despite the city’s new status, most of the additional railroad passengers were still served by the 1870 union depot, which had become too small. In addition to more space, some sought a building of greater architectural sophistication, “in keeping with the growing importance of the city” (Gardner 1964). In 1889, the Duluth Union Depot Company was organized to plan, build, and operate a new union depot. The Northern Pacific and the St. Paul and Duluth (later acquired by the Northern Pacific) each owned half of the capital stock in the new company, which acquired the site of the original union depot. At its July 1890 meeting, the Union Depot Company board of directors approved selection of the nationally recognized architectural firm Peabody, Stearns & Furber. The Minneapolis

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Summit Envirosolutions, Inc.

Duluth Union Depot
St. Louis County
contractor Haglin & Morse was selected as the builder, and construction was managed by J. S. Beeston, an engineer for the St. Paul and Duluth railroad (Gardner 1964; Duluthian 1972: 9-10).

As the original depot was being demolished in 1890, the architects developed a preliminary design for the new depot that called for a three-story building with free-standing towers, brownstone walls, and a wealth of ornamentation. The original design was modified to a French Renaissance Revival or Chateauesque style, and the towers were reduced to turrets. Begun in 1891, construction was largely completed by the fall of that year, and the Union Depot Company moved its offices into the building in October. All construction was completed in early 1892, and the depot began service in March. In addition to the depot building, the new facility included a massive enclosed train shed that covered the six sets of spur tracks and loading platforms (see Figures 3 and 4). The total cost of the depot building, train shed, and track system was $615,027. Also in 1892, the Duluth Union Depot Company was reorganized as the Duluth Union Depot and Terminal Company, which was controlled by the Northern Pacific through ownership of capital stock (“The Depot, 1892-1992” n.d.; Prosser 1966: 132).

**Architectural Significance of the Duluth Union Depot**

The architectural firm Peabody, Stearns and Furber designed the Depot. Established in 1870 as Peabody and Stearns, the firm’s two founding members were Robert S. Peabody and John G. Stearns. Peabody designed numerous public buildings on the East Coast and throughout the Midwest. Born in New Bedford, Massachusetts, in 1845, Peabody graduated from Harvard College (later University) in 1866, and then studied in England and France, where he trained in architecture at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. Returning to Boston in 1870, Peabody formed an architectural partnership with Stearns that lasted until 1917 when both men died. Stearns was born in New York City in 1843, but he grew up in Brookline, Massachusetts, and studied architecture at the Lawrence Scientific School in Cambridge. During the late 1860s, Stearns served an apprenticeship in the Boston office of Ware & Van Brunt before forming the partnership with Peabody in 1870. Over the course of their partnership, Peabody and Stearns designed university buildings, railroad stations, social halls, office buildings, churches, and residences. The firm is perhaps best known for their residential designs in Newport, Rhode Island, where they were awarded more commissions than McKim, Mead & White and Richard Morris Hunt. In addition to his commissioned work, Peabody served as the volunteer head of the Boston Parks Department. Both men would be elected as Fellows in the American Institute of Architects (AIA) (Holden 1973: 114-117).

An early commission of Peabody and Stearns was the Church of the Messiah (1879-1880) in St. Louis, which won the firm acclaim throughout the United States and abroad. The firm then established a St. Louis office in 1883, which was led by St. Louis architect Pierce P. Furber. A prominent architect in his own right, Furber, born in 1854, was trained at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and would be named as a Fellow in the AIA in 1889 and as the first president of the AIA St. Louis Chapter in 1890. Furber became a partner in 1890, and the firm was reorganized as Peabody, Stearns and Furber;
Figure 3. Duluth Union Depot on Sanborn Map, 1908

Figure 4. Duluth Union Depot, 1892
after Furber died in 1893, however, the firm reverted to its previous name, Peabody and Stearns (Stiritz 1980: Section 7, 2).

Working together for 47 years, Peabody and Stearns have been called “the chief wellsprings of architectural inspiration in their time” and “the most important arbiters of building taste after H. H. Richardson (Holden 1973: 114).” The firm was responsible for several landmark buildings in Boston, as well as fine examples of commercial and residential buildings. After Richardson’s death in 1886, Peabody and Stearns was considered by many to be Boston’s leading architectural firm. As described by architectural historian Annie Robinson:

Peabody & Stearns designed numerous commercial buildings, many for their home city of Boston. They designed the Park Square Railroad Station in 1876 (dem.), the R. H. White Warehouse (1883), the curved Boston Exchange Building (1887-1891) and the tower atop the Boston Custom House (1911-1914), among many others. Many of Peabody’s designs incorporated a tower, which became an early signature element (Holden 1973: 114).

According to architectural historian Wheaton Holden, “one of the most characteristic of Peabody and Stearns’ basic architectural forms over the years was the tower” (Holden 1973: 117). Indeed, their long-time chief draftsman, Julius Schweinfurth, pointed this out in an article titled, “Robert Swain Peabody – Tower Builder.” Their first notable design to include a tower was the Providence Railroad Depot (1872-1874), which was a Romanesque design with a prominent clock tower. Many of their designs for public buildings and railroad depots adhered to the Romanesque Revival style and included a prominent tower. Other examples of their depots included: the Central Railroad of New Jersey Depot in Jersey City (1889-1890); the depot in Lakewood, New Jersey (1892); and the St. Louis and San Francisco Railroad Depot in Springfield, Missouri (1894) (Holden 1973: 130).

In 1890, as the firm was designing the Duluth Union Depot, they developed a preliminary design with a clock tower similar to the Providence depot. The first design, however, was rejected locally, and Peabody and Stearns responded with a French Renaissance/Chateauesque design, which was an unusual stylistic turn for the firm and was a rare example in Minnesota.

Architectural historian David Gebhard highlighted the Depot as a prime example of the Chateauesque (French Renaissance) Revival style in Minnesota (Gebhard and Martinson 1977: 411). The design includes many common elements of this style and, characteristic of Peabody’s work, was controlled and slightly conservative, yet at the same time, included enough decorative features for an overall picturesque quality (Holden 1973: 120, 127). Design elements of the Depot that were typical of the French Renaissance Revival include: high pitched roofs and dormers and high pinnacles; projecting round corner turrets with conical tops; and round-arched windows with classical stone detailing.
The Depot is one of only a few buildings in Minnesota known to be designed by the firm of Peabody and Stearns, and the others are residences – the NRHP-listed James J. Hill House in St. Paul (1887-1888) and a house for Mrs. E. Gammel of Duluth (1894) (Holden 1973: 129). Designed by this nationally prominent firm, the Depot is an important contribution to the architecture of Minnesota and is among the finest designs in the city of Duluth. The building is a distinctive example of a period (French Renaissance Revival) and type (large union depot) of construction. Furthermore, because Peabody was better known for his work in the Queen Anne, Romanesque Revival, and English Colonial Revival styles, the Depot is an unusual example of him working in the French Renaissance Revival style and represents his ability to work in a range of architectural styles.

**Duluth Union Depot in the Twentieth Century**

From 1900 to 1920, Duluth continued its rapid growth, fueled by iron ore, wheat, and lumber, as well as a growing manufacturing, wholesale, and retail base. The population of the city during this period nearly doubled from about 53,000 to 99,000. During this period of growth, the Depot was the primary rail passenger facility serving Duluth. In 1900, 26 trains operated in and out (13 trains each way) of the Depot each day. Six stub-ended tracks connected with the passenger loading platforms, which were covered by the train shed, plus a through track provided access for the Duluth and Iron Range railroad from the northeast. At its peak during the 1910s, the Depot handled 60 trains per day, bringing thousands of people through Duluth each day (Dierckins n.d.) (Figures 5 and 6).

The high number of passengers passing through the Depot also spawned nearby businesses that catered to the travelling public. For example, five hotels and a patchwork of storefronts were located on Superior and Michigan Streets near the old union depot in 1888. By 1908, numerous hotels, including the Spalding, St. Louis, Lenox, Fifth Avenue, Nicollet, Elk, Bethe, Joliet, Belmont, McKay, and European as well as the Lyceum Theatre, were all within two blocks of the Depot. In addition, commercial storefronts lined Superior Street (Sanborn Map Company 1888 and 1908-1909).

In addition to serving passengers in and out of Duluth, the Depot was a terminal, and therefore, was the primary transfer point for travelers to and from the iron ranges. As quickly as Duluth grew during the early twentieth century, the Mesabi Iron Range grew even faster. With workers drawn to mine and mining-related jobs, the Mesabi grew from eight incorporated townsites and 15,800 people in 1900 to 16 incorporated townsites and over 84,000 people in 1920. As Duluth and Mesabi cities grew during the early twentieth century, tens of thousands of migrants to the area (immigrants as well as native-born) passed through the Depot. For example, over a span of just a few days in 1913, over 2,000 new residents came to northern Minnesota through the Depot (*The Duluthian* 1972: 10-11; Carole Zellie 2005: Section 3, 4-5).

Much like union or terminal depots in other large cities, the Depot offered a variety of services for the travelling public. There was an ornate general waiting room with seating for 70 persons, separate waiting rooms for women and men, a smoking room, a barber
Figure 5. Duluth Union Depot, 1908

Figure 6. Aerial View of Duluth Union Depot, 1920
shop, a newsstand, a fruit stand, a Western Union telegraph office, and a waiting area for immigrants that offered information as well as showers (Dierckins n.d.). Because nearly all long-distance travel was via railroads during the early twentieth century, travelers regardless of income or social standing used the Depot. This was consistent with railroads in general, whose influence on American life was at its peak during the early decades of the twentieth century. By 1920 for example, railroads directly employed two million people, carried the bulk of the mail, hauled 77 percent of the freight, and carried 98 percent of the traveling public (Stover 1970: 93).

If 1920 was the approximate peak year for railroads, a long period of decline began shortly thereafter. This decline was most noticeable and rapid for passenger traffic. Rail lines’ share of commercial passenger traffic dropped from 98 percent in 1916 to 75 percent by 1930, primarily from competition by buses. More dramatically, intercity private-automobile traffic not only surpassed that of the railroads during the 1920s, but by the end of the decade, it was six times greater. Cars and buses offered intense competition for the railroads’ passengers due to their greater flexibility, mobility, and in the case of automobiles, privacy. The number of registered automobiles nationwide grew from about 3.5 million in 1916 to 23 million by 1929, and intercity buses captured about 18 percent of commercial passenger traffic in 1930 (Stover 1961: 212-213, 238). The decline of railroad passengers accelerated after World War II, even for long-distance travel, as highways improved and air travel became more common.

Along with the general decline of railroads after 1920, Duluth began a period of slow growth from the 1920s through the 1950s, followed by a period of population loss. After rising rapidly during the previous several decades, the population of Duluth changed little over the 40 years after 1920, from about 99,000 to just under 107,000 by 1960. Most of this growth occurred outside of downtown and the port complex. A combination of economic changes led to retrenchment of the railroad/harbor complex, including the Panama Canal siphoning off Great Lakes shipping, the lumber industry shifting to the Pacific Northwest, and iron ore shipping fluctuating and eventually declining.

All of these factors led to a decline in the use of the Depot. Although four railroad companies continued to utilize the Depot through the 1920s, already by 1927 their operations were reduced to a total of 34 trains per day into and out of the station, which was a little over half the number of 10 years prior. Despite this decline, the Depot was still by far the largest of the depots in Duluth. By comparison, the Omaha Depot, which was also utilized by the Duluth Winnipeg and Pacific, handled 10 trains per day; the Soo Line Depot, which was also used by the Duluth South Shore and Atlantic, handled 14 trains per day (Hudson 1927: 51-59). Passenger traffic was, nevertheless, a shrinking market, revived only temporarily during World War II due to gas rationing. After the war, passage of the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956 established the interstate highway system, and subsequent appropriations financed the transition of the American transportation network from a railroad base to a highway base. Development of the highway system reflected a trend in transportation that was well-established by the mid 1950s. By then, railroads had slipped to third place among passenger carriers, behind automotive and aircraft. The railroads’ percentage of intercity commercial passenger
traffic continued the long decline that began in the 1920s, falling to 28 percent, while airline travel surged to over 30 percent (Stover 1961:238). Note: these percentages are for commercial passengers, and do not include private automobile travel, compared to which by the 1950s, railroad passengers would be an even smaller percentage.

With ridership in decline, by the 1960s railroads were closing passenger depots around the country, including in Duluth. In 1964 the Junior League of Duluth undertook a feasibility study for reuse of the nearby Soo Line depot, which was vacant, and began developing the idea of a cultural center. The focus shifted in 1968 to the Depot, which was slated to close the following year. After the last passenger train ran out of the Depot in 1969, the Area Cultural Center Corporation (later St. Louis County Heritage and Arts Center) was incorporated in 1970 to acquire the Depot property for rehabilitation. Because the Northern Pacific, Great Northern, and Chicago Burlington and Quincy railroads were in the process of merging into the Burlington Northern, sale of the Depot was not completed until 1972 (Figure 7). At that time, the Depot was conveyed to St. Louis County, which would own the facility, and the Heritage and Arts Center would operate it. Over the next five years, the Depot was rehabilitated, some interior spaces were reconfigured or restored (such as the Great Hall), and the recreated train shed and the performing arts addition were built. As of 2015, the Depot property is owned by St. Louis County and several cultural organizations are housed in the Depot, including the St. Louis County Historical Society, the Duluth Art Institute, the Lake Superior Railroad Museum (in the train shed), and five performing arts groups (in the addition).

Figure 7. Duluth Union Depot, 1972

From its opening in 1892 through the 1960s, the Depot was the largest railroad passenger depot in Duluth, which was the primary urban center for northern Minnesota and the state’s third largest city. In addition, because the Depot was a terminal, all passengers travelling to or from the Mesabi and Vermillion Iron Ranges on the Northern Pacific, Great Northern, D&IR, and DM&N passed through the Depot. As such, the Depot played a significant role in the rapid growth of Duluth and the Mesabi Iron Range from the 1890s to the 1920s. The Depot is also a significant architectural design in Duluth and
Minnesota, as a rare example of the work of Peabody and Stearns and of the French Renaissance Revival style in Minnesota.

3.3 Evaluation

The Depot is currently listed in the NRHP, but as explained in the Methods chapter above, the original nomination did not address several topics.

Significance Criteria and Period of Significance

The original nomination form does not specify the NRHP criteria for which the Depot is significant. The Statement of Significance in the original nomination, however, was focused on the architectural significance of the Depot. It appears that the intent was to nominate the Depot under Criterion C. Indeed, the Depot is an outstanding example of the French Renaissance Revival style of architecture by the noted Boston firm of Peabody, Stearns and Furber (Peabody and Stearns), and it clearly meets NRHP Criterion C. In addition, the nomination does not provide a period of significance for the Depot. However, it lists the year 1892 under “Specific Dates(s),” which is the year the Depot was built and could serve as a period of significance. This would further bolster the assertion that intent was to nominate the Depot under Criterion C because a single year is a typical period of significance for Criterion C but not for the other criteria.

It should be noted that, although it appears that the intent was to nominate the Depot under Criterion C, the building also may meet Criterion A in the area of Transportation as Duluth’s primary railroad passenger depot from 1892 through the first half of the twentieth century. The opening of the Depot corresponded with Duluth’s rapid growth during the 1880s and 1890s, and it was the primary passenger depot when Duluth was the retail and wholesale hub and main population center of northern Minnesota during the first half of the twentieth century.

As noted above, the period of significance of the Depot is 1892, when construction was completed and it was placed into service. If the Depot also meets Criterion A, a range of dates may be more appropriate for the building. For example, 1956 is the end date of the Railroads MPDF and was a time when passenger travel via railroads was in decline in Duluth and throughout Minnesota. The general decline of passenger traffic on railroads resulted from competition from other modes of transportation, particularly the automobile. In Duluth, the rate of in-migration had slowed considerably by the 1950s and was on the cusp of reversing, which would begin a period of population loss. This dynamic, combined with the shift to automotive transportation, led to a decline in passengers utilizing the Depot. For these reasons, 1956 could be an appropriate end date for the period of significance for the Depot.

Therefore, it is recommended that the intent of the original nomination was to list the Depot under Criterion C with a period of significance of 1892. It is further recommended that, if an updated nomination is prepared in the future, the Depot may also meet Criterion A with a period of significance that extends to 1956.
Boundaries of the Listed Property

The original nomination form for the Depot does not specify the boundaries of the property listed or the buildings and structures included in the listing: no legal description or acreage is provided, and boundaries are not delineated. However, the intent of the nomination can be inferred. In describing the property and when referring to it, the nomination only uses terms such as “depot,” “building,” and “structure,” but not terms such as “parcel,” “depot area,” “station,” or “depot and associated structures.” In addition, the Description section only describes the building itself and not the land or structures around it. For example, the canopy shelters, which had replaced the original train shed in the 1920s, and the loading platforms are not mentioned in the nomination, even though those structures were integral to the operation of the Depot. For these reasons, it appears that the intent was to nominate the Depot building itself.

In the years since the original nomination, there has been new construction on the parcel owned by St. Louis County. In 1975, the current train shed attached to the track side of the Depot was built as a reconstruction of the original train shed (though it was not intended to replicate the appearance of the original). In 1977 the performing arts wing was built as an addition to the Depot building. Because it appears that the original nomination intended the historic property to be the Depot building and because the train shed and addition was built after the nomination, it is recommended that they are not considered part of the listed property. Similarly, the Amtrak shed, which was built at about the same time the nomination was being prepared, is not named in the nomination and, therefore, is recommended as not part of the listed property. The proposed boundary of the listed property, the Depot building, is depicted in Figure2.
4.0 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Northern Lights Express (NLX) is a proposed high speed passenger rail project that would provide rail service between Minneapolis and Duluth. The project has received funding from the FRA, and must comply with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and its implementing regulations. As part of its responsibilities on behalf of FRA regarding Section 106, the MnDOT CRU has identified and evaluated historic properties that may be affected by this project, including the former Duluth Union Depot. The Depot was listed in the NRHP in 1971, and aspects of the listing were not specified. Summit completed a clarifying re-evaluation of the listed property, per 36 CFR 800.4(c)(1).

Andrew Schmidt served as Principal Investigator for the study. The field work was conducted on April 19 and 20, 2015. As a result of the re-evaluation, it is recommended that the listed property is the Depot building itself but does not include any of the adjacent buildings or structures. Furthermore, this re-evaluation concluded that the building was intended to be listed under Criterion C for its architectural design, with a period of significance of 1892. If an updated nomination for the Depot is prepared in the future, the property may also meet Criterion A and may have a period of significance that extends from 1892 to 1956.
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United States Department of Transportation
APPENDIX A. DULUTH UNION DEPOT PHOTOGRAPHS, 2015
Great hall, former ticket booth

Great hall, northeast corner

Northeast wing off of great hall

Southwest wing off of great hall; note: entrance to performing arts wing at center

Main stairwell to track level, looking up toward great hall

Immigrant waiting room
Former baggage handling area

Tracks in train shed, with false storefronts

Stairs to track level

Tracks and loading platform in train shed