

Northern Lights Express

Open House #4 Summary

Prepared for:



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1. Public Meeting Overview

1.1 Meeting Format

Three public meetings were held for the Northern Lights Express Project in May 2017. The purpose of these public meetings was to give attendees an opportunity to provide comments on the recently released Tier 2 Project Level Environmental Assessment (EA) and talk with project staff. Attendees reviewed display boards discussing potential environmental impacts and an overview of the NLX Project status and schedule. Handouts were available and project staff were on hand to provide project updates and answer questions.

Meeting locations were selected to reach three main areas of the corridor on the north end, south end, and middle. Meetings were held in Coon Rapids, Sandstone, and Duluth, Minnesota.

Each meeting was two hours in length and conducted in an open house format with visual display boards, maps, and hard/electronic copies of the Tier 2 EA. Attendees were provided with the opportunity to submit written comments or provide verbal testimony to a court reporter. Staff from the Minnesota Department of Transportation, Wisconsin Department of Transportation (in Duluth), Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance, cities and project consultants were available to answer questions.



Attendees reviewing environmental document in Sandstone, MN

1.2 Attendance

There were 85 total attendees at the public meetings. Meeting and attendee information is shown in **Table 1**.

Table 1 – Open House Attendance

Date/Time	Location	Attendance*
May 16, 2017 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.	Sandstone Senior Center <i>Sandstone, MN</i>	17; 1 media
May 17, 2017 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.	Duluth Depot <i>Duluth, MN</i>	44; 2 media
May 18, 2017 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.	Coon Rapids Civic Center <i>Coon Rapids, MN</i>	24; 1 media
	TOTAL	85 attendees; 4 media

**Attendance figures based on participants who signed in and does not include staff.*

1.3 Notification

Notification of the public meetings was provided on the NLX website, through the project email list, MnDOT social media – reaching over 34,000 people – and through the NLX Alliance website, email list and social media – reaching over 5,000 people. In addition, a public meeting announcement was sent to individual stakeholders throughout the corridor, which included representatives of cities, counties, chambers of commerce, local organizations and media outlets. All stakeholders were encouraged to forward the public meeting notice and to post it on agency/organization websites and social media sites.

Legal notices regarding the release of the Tier 2 EA and promotion of the public meetings were published in the Duluth News Tribune and Superior Telegram on May 2 and Star Tribune on May 7. Additional display ads were published in the Isanti County News (May 3), Pine City Pioneer (May 4), Hinckley News (May 4), Anoka County Herald (May 5), Duluth News Tribune (May 7), Superior Telegram (May 7), and the Star Tribune (May 7).

Television media outlets that covered the meeting included the WDIO News – Channel 10 – Duluth, MN; KBJR Channel 6 – Duluth, MN; and CTN Studios – Coon Rapids, MN along with the Askov American Newspaper outlet.



Media coverage of public meeting in Duluth, MN

1.4 Information Presented

At the public meetings, information was provided regarding the environmental review process along with potential environmental impacts and findings including socioeconomic and community resources; threatened and endangered species; transportation; noise and vibration; parks and recreation; 4(f) properties; historic properties; wetlands; and water resources. Hard copies of the Tier 2 EA were available which allowed attendees to review maps of the corridor and where potential impacts would be located. In addition, descriptions and maps of the layover facility in Duluth and two potential maintenance facilities in either Sandstone or Duluth were available for viewing. Physical models of a potential station and railroad grade crossing treatments (dual gates, dual gates with median and quad gates) were also on display.

General project information was provided via display boards including an overview of the project, current status and anticipated schedule. Station locations, preliminary design and general amenities were also displayed for all stations throughout the corridor.

Handouts provided at the meeting included a project overview, testimonial brochure, and railroad grade crossing treatment overview. These handouts were available as a take-away to meeting attendees. Comment sheets were also provided for meeting participants to leave feedback about the project if they preferred to leave hand written comments instead of verbal comments with the court reporter.

All open house boards and handouts are available on the project website: www.mndot.gov/nlx.

1.5 Next Steps

Through early-June 2017, the project team responded to agency and public comments on the Tier 2 EA and submitted it to Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for approval followed by a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). Successful completion of the Tier 2 EA and receipt of a FONSI will position the NLX Project to receive funding for final design and construction.

2. Summary of Comments

Public meeting attendees were provided with a comment sheet to submit feedback about the Tier 2 EA. A court reporter was also available for anyone who preferred to leave comments verbally.

Review of the comments/questions received, through comment sheets and verbally, at the meeting found several common themes including anticipation and support for the implementation of NLX Project, questions about potential environmental impacts, concern about NLX Project operations and impacts, and preference for the maintenance facility location in Sandstone.

2.1 Written and verbal comments received

A compilation of written and verbal comments was received from comment sheets, through the court reporter, and verbally at each public meeting. **Table 2** indicates the number of comment sheets and court reporter comments submitted at each meeting.

Table 2 – Comment Sheets and Verbal Comments Submitted

Location	Number of Comment Sheets	Number of Verbal Comments
Sandstone Senior Center	3	5
Duluth Depot	10	2
Coon Rapids Civic Center	2	2

At the meeting located in Sandstone, the team received many comments in favor of the NLX Project. Attendees noted a preference for the maintenance facility to be located in Sandstone and for a future stop in Sandstone. Questions were raised regarding the train's operations, concern with noise to residences and potential impacts to wetlands. Other comments received noted a need for increased public transit in Minnesota and concerns regarding overall project costs.

At the meeting located in Duluth, the team again received many comments in favor of the NLX Project noting it would be a great alternate travel option. However, in Duluth, attendees also noted concerns regarding train operations and impacts including safety, noise, project costs, and traveler expenses.

At the final meeting in Coon Rapids, the team received comments noting support for the NLX Project especially since it is expected to have a low environmental impact and will serve as an alternate travel option to Duluth. Additionally, attendees had concerns about the Coon Rapids station location in relation to future track improvements and a need for increased train frequency.

All meeting comments were individually gathered and responses to each comment can be found in the FONSI document published on the project website at www.mndot.gov/nlx/documents.html.