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Northern Lights Express

February 2017

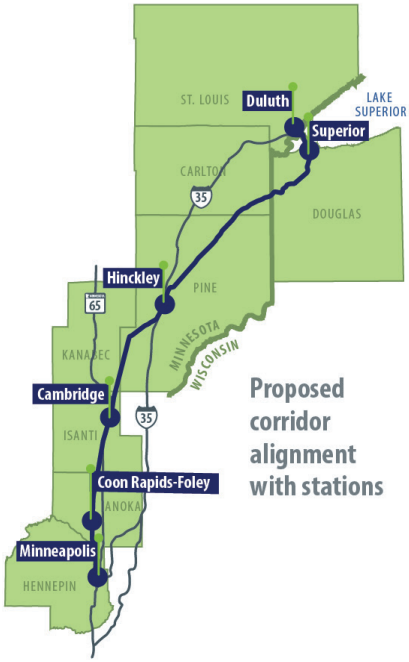
Askov Open House

ABOUT NLX

The Northern Lights Express is a proposed high speed intercity passenger rail project to provide rail service between Minneapolis and Duluth. The NLX Project would operate on approximately 152 miles of existing BNSF railway track.

The NLX Project is being managed by the Minnesota Department of Transportation in consultation with the Federal Railroad Administration, and with cooperation from the Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance, Wisconsin Department of Transportation, and local communities.

NLX CORRIDOR MAP



OVERVIEW OF OCTOBER PUBLIC MEETINGS

In October 2016, the public attended several Northern Lights Express open houses. The purpose of the open houses was to provide information about improvements that will be made to 43 "critical" at-grade railroad/roadway crossings (grade crossings) - see sidebar - in the corridor as part of the NLX Project. These upgrades will improve safety and functionality at grade crossings. Open houses were held in Hinckley, Cambridge and Askov, Minnesota; and Superior, Wisconsin, as a large number of grade crossings are located in or near these cities.

Approximately 75 community members and local media attended the open houses and viewed materials identifying plans for grade crossings, general project information and an update on the environmental review process. Drawings and models of various grade crossing warning device improvements were available.

Participants were pleased to hear that the NLX Project does not plan to close any grade crossings and asked questions about individual crossing plans and improvements. Attendees expressed enthusiasm and support for NLX service and operations.

What's a "critical" at-grade railroad crossing?

A "critical at-grade railroad crossing" is where the steep roadway approaches to the crossing are unable to accommodate vehicles with low ground clearances such as longer trucks and recreational vehicles. As part of the NLX Project, reconfiguration of these crossings is proposed.

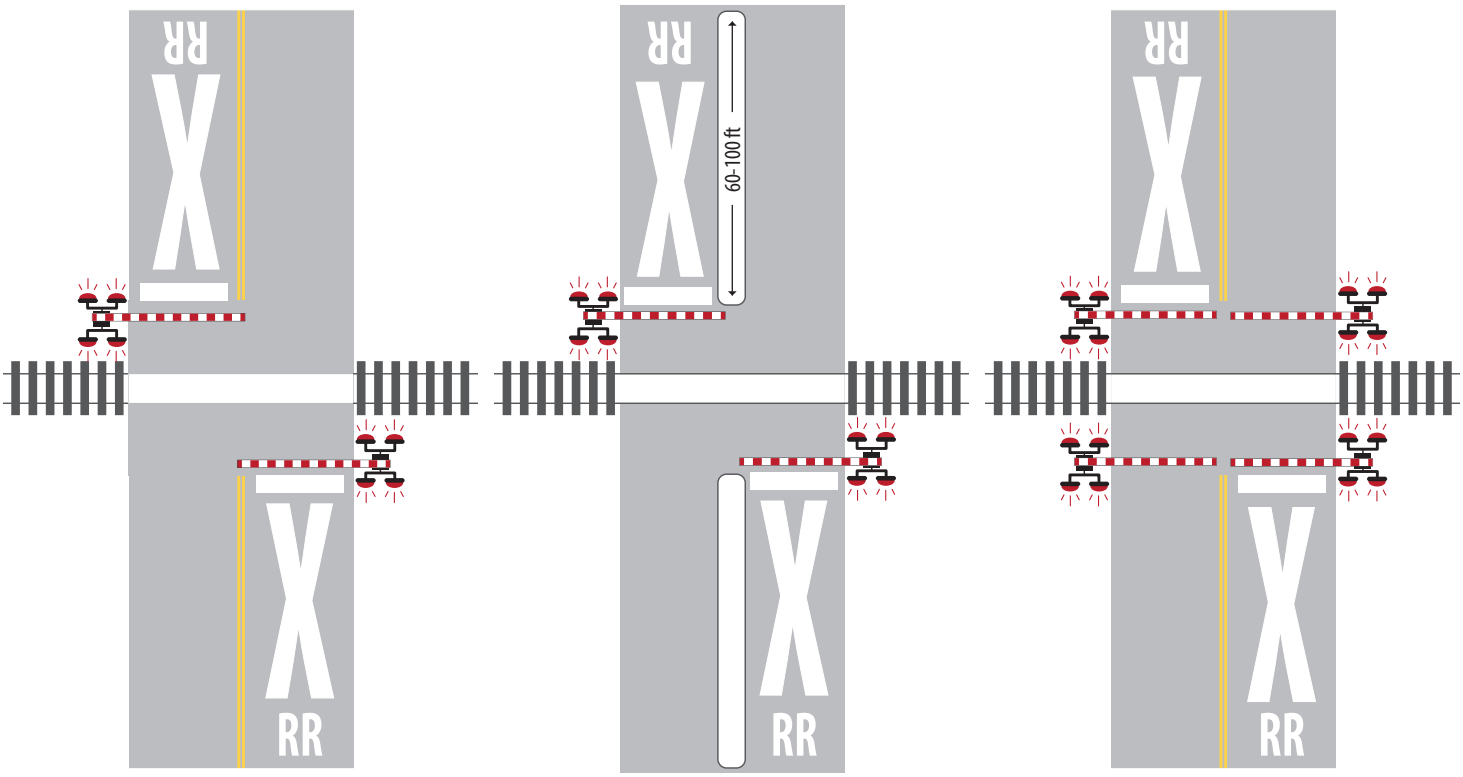
Superior Open House

Cambridge Open House

IMPROVEMENTS FOR AT-GRADE RAILROAD CROSSINGS IN THE NLX CORRIDOR

There are 117 public and 44 private grade crossings in the NLX Corridor. The NLX Project proposes installation of active warning devices, reconstruction of approach roadways, installation of medians, and rail infrastructure-related improvements such as construction of an additional track across the roadway. ***The NLX Project is not proposing to close any public or private grade crossings.***

Currently, 62 of the public crossings are equipped with automatic gates and flashing lights and the remainder are stop sign-controlled. As part of the NLX Project, each public grade crossing will be equipped with automatic gate systems and flashing-light signals. The options for automatic gate systems are as follows:



Two Gates
- Flashing-light signals
- Automatic gate arm before the tracks for each direction of travel
- Crossbuck sign (Railroad Crossing sign)

Two Gates with Median
- Flashing-light signals
- Automatic gate arm before the tracks for each direction of travel
- Crossbuck sign (Railroad Crossing sign)
- Four-foot wide raised concrete median

Four Gates
- Flashing-light signals
- Four automatic gate arms – two for each direction; one gate before the tracks, and the other after the tracks
- Crossbuck sign (Railroad Crossing sign)

In locations where there is insufficient room for a median, due to close proximity of a roadway parallel to the track or because a median would block driveways, four gates will be installed. A total of 37 grade crossings will be upgraded with four gates and flashing lights. Approximately 52 grade crossings will be equipped with a standard treatment of two gates and flashing lights with a median. On unimpaired and other low-volume roadways, two gates with flashing lights and no median will be installed at each grade crossing. There are 16 grade crossings that do not require upgrades or the upgrades will be done by other entities.

Schedule Timeline

STATION SPOTLIGHT: CAMBRIDGE

The Cambridge City Center Mall, a heavily used community facility in the heart of the city, will house the NLX Cambridge station. Located just off Buchanan Street North and west of the existing BNSF railroad tracks, the station's central location is well-connected to local and regional transportation facilities and is accessible to pedestrians, transit users, and vehicles. The site has convenient local and regional access from 1st Avenue East, Main Street, Highway 65 and Highway 95. The City of Cambridge supports the proposed station site because of its potential to serve local businesses and the downtown area. The Cambridge Common Council passed a resolution supporting the site in November 2014.

Conceptual layout of the Cambridge Station

The passenger waiting area will be located in the mall; the boarding platform will be located within BNSF right-of-way. Construction of the station will not require private property acquisition and the large site will accommodate modern intercity passenger rail service, and provide:

- A climate controlled passenger waiting area and on-site ticket kiosk machines
- A 500-foot-long platform with warming shelters
- Short-term and long-term parking
- Multimodal access with efficient passenger, taxi and bus drop-off, and bicycle parking
- Americans with Disabilities Act compliant facilities

The station platform will be placed 300 feet from the nearby Highway 95 grade crossing, allowing the crossing gates at Highway 95 to remain open while a train is at the station. Also, the new NLX signaling system will reduce delays on Highway 95 by freight train blockage.

RAILROAD SPEAK

What happens when trains are operating in both directions on a rail line with only one main track? At locations where opposing trains will meet each other, a second track, called a siding, is constructed enabling one train to enter the siding so that the opposing train can pass. Where a "meet" needs to take place, the train dispatcher issues movement orders by radio, instructing each train which track to use. Without modern signaling, the crew entering the siding must manually operate the switches at both ends of the siding, delaying one or both trains.

Centralized Traffic Control is a signal control system that displays the location of trains on the line and allows the train dispatcher to select train routes, align track switches and set wayside signals from a central office location. With CTC, the train dispatcher can align siding switches in advance so that the train entering the siding does not have to stop and align the switches by hand. This minimizes the delay to one or both trains. ***Positive Train Control*** is a state-of-the-art enforcement system, mandated by Congress, which must be installed on rail lines that either have passenger trains or handle certain classes of hazardous materials. PTC is designed to stop a train within the limits of the movement granted by the train dispatcher through the CTC system. It also enforces compliance with speed restrictions, work zone limits and certain other restrictions on the line. The installation of CTC and PTC has substantial passenger and freight train safety and operations benefits. The NLX Project must install CTC and PTC to operate between Coon Rapids and Duluth.


Track turnout at beginning of a siding

ENVIRONMENTAL UPDATE

For the past several months, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, in consultation with the Federal Railroad Administration and in cooperation with the Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance and Wisconsin Department of Transportation, has been working on the Tier 2 Project Level Environmental Assessment for the NLX Project. The Tier 2 EA builds on the NLX Tier 1 Service Level EA prepared in 2013, and addresses specific project-related issues and likely environmental effects associated with proposed track infrastructure, stations, and layover and maintenance facilities. Recent work activities have included:

- Conducting field reviews throughout the corridor, updating the technical analysis from the Tier 1 EA
- Coordinating with reviewing agencies in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

The Tier 2 Project Level EA is scheduled to be released for public review in spring 2017. During the public review period, MnDOT will be holding public meetings in the NLX Corridor to review the findings of the technical analysis. Specific details regarding where the Tier 2 Project Level EA document will be available for review and how to provide comments will be provided in early spring 2017. Following the public review and comment period, the FRA will issue a final environmental determination for the NLX Project.

Hinckley Open House

NLX FACTS TO SHARE WITH YOUR ELECTED OFFICIAL

The Minnesota State Legislature is in session through mid-May 2017. The state legislature will be responsible for approving funding for NLX as well as accepting federal funding that will be necessary to finance the project. Contact your state legislators to talk about the NLX Project. Don't know who your legislators are? Find out at *www.gis.leg.mn/iMaps/districts/*

Here's are some ***NLX fast facts*** to share with your elected officials:

- NLX will ***operate on 152 miles of an existing BNSF Railway tracks*** between Target Field Station in Minneapolis and the Depot in Duluth with stations located in Coon Rapids, Cambridge, Hinckley, and Superior.
- NLX will provide ***connections to the Twin Cities*** regional transit system, intercity rail service and other intermodal opportunities.
- The ***total cost*** to establish reliable, daily, high-speed intercity passenger rail service including infrastructure improvements to improve passenger and freight rail safety, is estimated ***between $500 million and $600 million***.
- The operating schedule includes ***four round trips per day*** at speeds up to ***90 miles per hour*** with a travel time of approximately ***2½ hours***.
- ***Infrastructure improvements*** include upgrading safety measures at grade crossings.
- ***Projected ridership*** for the first year of operation, which could be as early as 2020, is ***750,000 trips*** and increasing up to one million trips in 2040.
- Current estimates put ***operating costs at $17.5 million per year*** for the first five years; revenue from fares is expected to cover most of this cost, with an anticipated subsidy of between $3 million and $5 million per year, for the first five years, and will drop over time as ridership grows.
- NLX will result in ***economic, safety and quality of life benefits*** by strengthening the region's intercity connections.
- NLX will ***foster economic growth*** by broadening the labor market and connecting workers to a wider network of employers; increasing investments and station-related development; and enhancing local tourism.
- The Tier 2 Environmental Assessment, Preliminary Engineering, Financial Plan, Implementation Plan and Service Development Plan will be completed by mid-2017.
- By mid-2017, the NLX Project will be in position to move into ***final design and construction,*** a critical milestone that makes a project eligible for federal funding, which is expected to be the source of 80% of the total project development cost.
- If federal funding is available in a timely fashion, NLX ***service could begin as early as 2020.***

Additional Questions or Comments?

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