

Written Testimony in Support of HF 409, Northern Lights Express

February 28, 2023

My name is Mathews Hollinshead. I live at 2114 Pinehurst Ave., St. Paul 55116, 651-492-0645.

Thank you for this bill and for this opportunity to testify in favor.

In the past 30 years, I have traveled 35,000 miles on Amtrak throughout the nation. I am also Conservation Chair of the North Star Chapter of the Sierra Club, with 50,000 members, supporters and allies statewide. We know that train travel is the most energy-efficient of all modes and potentially an important tool to address climate change.

Train travel is also important as an alternative to driving for fast-growing numbers of baby-boomers no longer interested or able to drive, for children not yet of driving age and for those with disabilities that prevent use of a car or bus.

I strongly support HF 409 funding the Northern Lights Express.

My grandfather worked for over a decade as an electrical superintendent at the steel mill in Morgan Park west of Duluth. As a teenager, my father often took the steamer Montauk between there and Duluth. He also took me to the opening ceremonies for the St. Lawrence Seaway in the 1950s. My other grandfather's first job as a civil engineer involved design of rail infrastructure serving the bulk loading docks of the harbor.

For myself and my family, Duluth is not just a stop on the way to canoe country. It's a destination. It's not just a working port with one of the highest tonnages in the world. It's a spectacular setting — one of the scenic treasures of Minnesota. Recent research suggests it may also become a destination for climate refugees from other coasts of the U.S.

Connecting to it by passenger rail is consistent with a new effort to reimagine its connections to its own waterfront, specifically the effort to reverse the isolation created by I35. Those living there will also want good connections to the Twin Cities.

My wife and I are retired and would love to visit Duluth several times each year as a getaway without depending on over-the-road buses, our electric vehicle — charging stations are not yet as reliable as they need to be — or air.

On our most recent trip from St. Paul our ICE (internal combustion engine) rental car cost \$650 for two days.

We would spend more than that per visit in Duluth on hotels and restaurants if we could get there by rail. We have attended Tall Ships Duluth several times. We've talked about buying or renting in Duluth as a getaway.

Question: Is the Wisconsin segment vulnerable to Wisconsin politics for funding or other support? I hope not. It is important for many reasons that this project be free of obstruction, either in planning, construction or operation, from anti-passenger rail special interests here or elsewhere.