



Saint Louis County

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Annie Harala
County Commissioner

March 7, 2025

Minnesota House Transportation Finance and Policy Committee
Chair Jon Koznick and Committee Members
Minnesota House of Representatives
Centennial Office Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Subject: Opposition to HF 1167 and Support for the Northern Lights Express

Dear Chair Koznick and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of St. Louis County, I am writing to **strongly oppose House File 1167**, which seeks to prohibit expenditures for the Northern Lights Express (NLX) passenger rail project. This critical investment in rail infrastructure will bring substantial benefits to St. Louis County and Greater Minnesota by improving passenger mobility, modernizing freight rail capacity, and driving economic growth.

The Northern Lights Express is more than just a passenger rail project—it is a necessary infrastructure upgrade that will improve transportation efficiency for businesses, industries, and residents across the region. St. Louis County, which encompasses Duluth and many communities along the NLX corridor, stands to gain significantly from the increased connectivity, job creation, and enhanced freight movement that this project will provide.

Economic and Transportation Benefits for St. Louis County

St. Louis County relies on strong transportation networks to support our businesses, workforce, and tourism industry. The Northern Lights Express will:

- **Increase Workforce Access** – Reliable rail service will give residents greater access to jobs, education, and healthcare, expanding economic opportunities for workers across the region.
- **Boost Tourism and Local Businesses** – As the gateway to Minnesota's North Shore, Boundary Waters, and Iron Range, Duluth and surrounding communities will see increased visitor traffic from NLX passengers, providing a major boost to the local economy.
- **Expand Public Transportation Options** – Many St. Louis County residents currently lack affordable, long-distance transit alternatives. NLX will offer a safe, efficient, and environmentally friendly option for those traveling to and from the Twin Cities.

Strengthening the Freight Rail Corridor

In addition to its passenger benefits, NLX will deliver crucial improvements to the freight rail network that serves St. Louis County's industrial and shipping sectors. This corridor is a major conduit for iron ore, timber, and other key commodities moving from our region to national and international markets. By upgrading rail infrastructure, NLX will:

- **Enhance Rail Efficiency** – Modernized tracks, signals, and crossings will reduce delays and allow for greater coordination between freight and passenger rail operations.
- **Increase Freight Capacity** – Strengthened rail corridors mean businesses can move goods more efficiently, reducing costs and keeping Minnesota industries competitive.
- **Reduce Highway Congestion and Wear** – Improved rail freight capacity helps shift cargo from trucks to trains, alleviating pressure on major roadways like I-35 and reducing long-term highway maintenance costs.

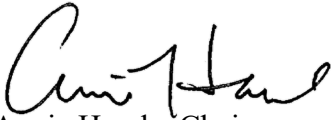
Maximizing Federal Investment in Minnesota's Rail Network

The federal government has prioritized passenger rail investment, providing a rare opportunity for Minnesota to secure significant funding to modernize our transportation system. HF 1167 would block state expenditures on NLX, effectively turning away federal dollars and delaying much-needed improvements to our rail infrastructure. Other states are moving forward with rail expansion—Minnesota cannot afford to fall behind.

For these reasons, St. Louis County urges you to **oppose HF 1167** and support the Northern Lights Express as a transformative investment in transportation, economic growth, and rail infrastructure. This project will ensure that St. Louis County, and all of Minnesota, remains competitive and well-connected for generations to come.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to working together to advance Minnesota's transportation and economic future.

Sincerely,



Annie Harala, Chair

St. Louis County Board of Commissioners