



North East Area Labor Council

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March 7, 2025
House Transportation Finance and Policy Committee
Chair Jon Koznick and Committee Members
Minnesota House of Representatives
Centennial Office Building
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Chair Koznick and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Northeast Area Labor Council and the thousands of hardworking union members we represent, I am writing to express our strong opposition to House File 1167, which seeks to prohibit expenditures for the Northern Lights Express (NLX) passenger rail project. The NLX is an opportunity to invest in our state's transportation infrastructure while creating high-quality union construction jobs, improving workforce mobility, and ensuring better transportation access for working people, seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities.

The construction of the Northern Lights Express will provide significant economic benefits, particularly through the creation of good-paying, union construction jobs that support Minnesota's working families. This project will:

- Put Thousands of Skilled Tradespeople to Work – From track construction to station upgrades, NLX will create high-quality jobs for union laborers, electricians, operating engineers, carpenters, and other skilled workers.
- Support Apprenticeship and Workforce Development – Large infrastructure projects like NLX provide essential training opportunities for apprentices and young workers, helping to strengthen Minnesota's construction workforce for future generations.
- Boost Local Economies – The wages earned by construction workers will be spent in communities along the corridor, supporting local businesses and creating a ripple effect of economic growth.

The Northern Lights Express is about more than just transportation—it's about expanding opportunity for all Minnesotans. Many workers in northeastern Minnesota face long, expensive commutes to the Twin Cities for job opportunities. A fast, reliable, and affordable rail option will:

- Increase Access to Jobs – Reliable transportation is essential for economic opportunity. NLX will make it easier for workers to access high-paying jobs in the Twin Cities without the burden of long, costly car commutes.
- Reduce Transportation Costs – The rising cost of gas and vehicle maintenance is a financial burden for many working people. NLX will provide an affordable alternative to driving, saving families money.
- Alleviate Road Congestion and Improve Safety – With fewer cars on the road, traffic congestion on I-35 will decrease, improving safety and reducing road maintenance costs.

Transportation access is a critical issue for seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities who may not have the option to drive. NLX will provide:

- Reliable Transportation for Seniors – Many older adults rely on public transit for medical appointments, shopping, and visiting family. A dependable rail service will offer them greater mobility and independence.
- Support for Veterans – Many veterans travel to the Twin Cities for healthcare and employment opportunities. NLX will provide a much-needed connection for those who have served our country.
- Fully Accessible Travel for People with Disabilities – Public transportation options that meet ADA requirements are essential for people with disabilities. NLX will provide a safe, convenient, and accessible option for those who need it most.

The federal government has prioritized funding for passenger rail, providing Minnesota with an opportunity to modernize its transportation system at a lower cost to taxpayers. By prohibiting state expenditures, HF 1167 would force Minnesota to forfeit these funds while other states move forward with their rail expansion projects. Blocking NLX is not just a missed opportunity—it's a step backward for Minnesota's workers, businesses, and economy.

The Northeast Area Labor Council urges you to oppose HF 1167 and support the Northern Lights Express as a vital investment in our workforce, economy, and transportation future. This project will create thousands of union jobs, expand economic opportunities for working people, and ensure a more connected and accessible Minnesota.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to working with you to advance policies that support Minnesota's working families and invest in the future of our state.

Sincerely,

Lee Cutler
North East Area Labor Council

