

## **Written Testimony in Support of HF 409, Northern Lights Express**

**March 3, 2023**

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

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

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 major modes and potentially an important tool to address climate change.

Rail travel is important as an alternative for baby-boomers no longer interested or able to drive, for children under driving age, for those with disabilities and, not least, for those who love walkable cities and towns. I strongly support HF 409 and Senate File 202 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 could be a destination for climate refugees from other coasts. Those relocating to Duluth would want good, green connections to the Twin Cities.

Connecting by passenger rail is consistent with a new effort to reimagine connections to its own waterfront, specifically the effort to reverse the isolation created by I35. 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. Last year Viking Cruises launched, from Duluth, itineraries for which we would be prime prospects if we did not have to drive. Duluth Depot is a short block from our usual hotel, the Radisson, and Duluth is reimaging its central library, right between the Depot and the Radisson.

It is important that this project be free of delay, either in planning, construction or operation. I urge appropriation for the full project, including operating expense the first few years, in one bill.