



U.S. Department
of Transportation

**Federal Railroad
Administration**

EI-24565

FD 36052

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

JUN 29 2016

RE: Northern Lights Express (NLX) Passenger Rail Service from Minneapolis to Duluth, Minnesota traveling through Douglas County, Wisconsin

Hennepin, Anoka, Isanti, Kanabec, Pine, Carlton and St. Louis counties in Minnesota; Douglas County in Wisconsin

Dear Tribal Representative:

In accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and its implementing regulations at 36 CFR 800, the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is initiating consultation regarding the Northern Lights Express Project (NLX Project). The NLX Project, which is also the undertaking for purposes of Section 106, is being conducted with cooperation from the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT), and the Minneapolis-Duluth/Superior Passenger Rail Alliance. The Section 106 process requires identifying and consulting with Tribes that attach religious and cultural significance to historic properties that may be affected by the Project (36 CFR 800.2(c)(2)).

The NLX Project proposes to provide intercity passenger rail service between Target Field Station in Minneapolis, Minnesota (MN) to The Depot in Duluth, MN. Additional stations would be located adjacent to the tracks in Coon Rapids, Cambridge, Hinckley, and Superior, Wisconsin (WI) (see attached graphics). The 152-mile corridor would utilize existing BNSF Railway railroad track; proposed track, road crossing, and railroad bridge improvements would be located predominantly within the existing railroad right-of-way. In addition to the aforementioned station locations, there would be layover and maintenance facilities adjacent to the BNSF tracks in either Sandstone or Duluth, MN. The operating plan calls for providing four round-trips daily, operating at a maximum speed of 90 miles per hour (mph). More information about the NLX Project is available at the project website: <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/nlx>

In 2013, FRA and MnDOT prepared a Tier 1 Service-Level Environmental Assessment (EA) in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act that evaluated impacts of the corridor as a whole; the preferred alternative for passenger rail service evaluated in the EA utilized the existing BNSF corridor. FRA and MnDOT are now preparing a Tier 2 Project-Level EA that will evaluate potential social, cultural, environmental, and transportation-related impacts

Northern Lights Express Passenger Rail Project 2

resulting from the NLX Project based on preliminary engineering. Currently, no funding has been identified for final design or project construction.

In 2014, MnDOT completed an architectural history survey of the corridor that identified above-ground properties within 500 feet either side of the BNSF line. If you would like a copy of the survey, please copy me. This summer, MnDOT is planning to conduct an archaeological survey along the corridor and at the locations where stations and supporting facilities would be constructed.

Through consultation, FRA hopes to incorporate into the Section 106 process any concerns you may have regarding effects of the NLX Project to historic properties of religious or cultural significance to your Tribe, and provide an opportunity for your participation in the continuing process to identify and evaluate the effects of the NLX Project on cultural resources, and in the resolution of any adverse effects that may result from the NLX Project.

If you have questions about or would like to discuss the NLX Project, please contact Andrea Martin, FRA Environmental Protection Specialist, at (202) 493-6201 or andrea.martin@dot.gov; or Garneth Peterson, MnDOT Passenger Rail Environmental Manager, at (651) 366-3615 or garneth.peterson@state.mn.us. FRA is available for formal government-to-government consultation at your request.

In order to provide the most thorough consideration of historic properties as FRA and MnDOT move forward with the Tier 2 NEPA and Section 106 processes, we would greatly appreciate receiving your questions or comments within 30 days of your receipt of this letter.

Sincerely,



Laura Shick
Federal Preservation Officer
Environmental & Corridor Planning Division
Office of Railroad Policy and Development

Cc: Garneth Peterson, MnDOT
Jim Becker, WisDOT
Barbara Howard, MnHPO
Jim Draeger, WisSHPO
Catharine Nadals, STB

FACILITY SITE LOCATIONS

DULUTH



Union Depot



Area bounded by I-35, Railroad Street, Garfield Ave and Jeno's Walk

SUPERIOR



Downtown

SANDSTONE



South of Oak St

HINCKLEY



Downtown

CAMBRIDGE



City Center

MINNEAPOLIS



Target Field Station

COON RAPIDS



Foley Blvd

KEY



Potential station site



Potential maintenance facility site



Potential layover facility site



**Northern Lights Express
(NLX) Corridor from
Target Field Station in
Minneapolis to The
Depot in Duluth, MN**



Encl: Figure 1-Project Corridor Map
Figure 2-Station locations

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