

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

The Honorable Steve Womack  
Chairman  
Transportation, Housing, and Urban  
Development, and related agencies  
Subcommittee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable James Clyburn  
Ranking Member  
Transportation, Housing, and Urban  
Development, and related agencies  
Subcommittee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

May 23, 2025

We are writing to urge the Transportation, Housing, and Urban Development Subcommittee to include language in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 appropriations legislation that would limit or eliminate the use of any federal dollars for three projects in Minnesota. The Northstar Commuter Rail, the Blue Line Light Rail Extension, and the Northern Lights Express commuter line pose significant concerns for taxpayers. Continuing funding for these projects would be financially irresponsible.

Investments in transportation infrastructure are essential to keeping Minnesotans and our economy moving, not only for our generation but for generations to come. We have long believed that targeted funding for critical repairs and improvements should be prioritized by Congress with strong community backing, rigorous oversight, and long-term value in mind. Unfortunately, these three projects have raised serious financial and community-centered concerns. As such, any future federal investment should be closely scrutinized and all short-term funding for these specific projects should be eliminated.

First, the Northstar Commuter Rail from Big Lake to Target Field in Minneapolis has become a costly \$320 million failed experiment in commuter transit, culminating in near-zero ridership.<sup>1</sup> While ridership has never met expectations, it fell from 2,660 daily riders in 2019 to just 275 in 2022, a 90% decline.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, taxpayers continue to shoulder the nearly \$12 million burden in annual operating costs.<sup>3</sup> Given the millions of dollars owed to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for their portion of this project and the ongoing collapse in ridership, continuing any funding for the Northstar Commuter Rail is a disservice to taxpayers.

Second, the Blue Line Light Rail Extension has raised significant concerns that the \$3.2 billion-dollar project will be over budget and another boondoggle with minimal ridership, huge capital, and adverse effects on Minnesotans. Already, the 27,000 weekday riders projected on the Blue

---

1 "Northstar Rail Corridor Post-Pandemic Study." *Metrocouncil.Org*, 31 Mar. 2023, [metrocouncil.org/Transportation/System/Transit/Studies/Northstar-Rail-Corridor-Post-Pandemic-Study.aspx?page 4](https://metrocouncil.org/Transportation/System/Transit/Studies/Northstar-Rail-Corridor-Post-Pandemic-Study.aspx?page 4).

2 "Northstar Rail Corridor Post-Pandemic Study." *Metrocouncil.Org*, 31 Mar. 2023, [metrocouncil.org/Transportation/System/Transit/Studies/Northstar-Rail-Corridor-Post-Pandemic-Study.aspx?page 6](https://metrocouncil.org/Transportation/System/Transit/Studies/Northstar-Rail-Corridor-Post-Pandemic-Study.aspx?page 6).

3 "Northstar Rail Corridor Post-Pandemic Study." *Metrocouncil.Org*, 31 Mar. 2023, [metrocouncil.org/Transportation/System/Transit/Studies/Northstar-Rail-Corridor-Post-Pandemic-Study.aspx?page 43](https://metrocouncil.org/Transportation/System/Transit/Studies/Northstar-Rail-Corridor-Post-Pandemic-Study.aspx?page 43).

Line has been more than halved to 12,500 since its inception, yet this extension plan has marched forward.<sup>4</sup> The wasteful project would span 13.5 miles and cause seven intersections in the area to exceed capacity.<sup>5</sup> This is unacceptable, and any federal funds for this project will continue a cycle of reckless spending by the Metropolitan Council and should not be allocated.

Finally, the Northern Lights Express (NLX) commuter line from Duluth to St. Paul, currently in the planning stage, raises significant concerns. In 2023, the Minnesota legislature allocated \$194.7 million as a 20% local match in hopes of leveraging future federal grants to build out this line.<sup>6</sup> According to Minnesota's Department of Transportation (MnDOT), the total estimated cost of construction is approximately \$600 million, leaving taxpayers liable for a \$400 million loan and another potentially mismanaged commuter line. Beyond ridership and cost concerns, Minnesota is now projecting a deficit of nearly \$6 billion in the years ahead.<sup>7</sup> Without federal grants, this project cannot move forward, and the \$194.7 million can be repurposed to meet more immediate infrastructure and general fund deficit concerns.

As your Subcommittee prepares legislation for 2026, we respectfully urge careful consideration of these projects. It is essential that federal resources be reserved for efforts that demonstrate clear value for our constituents and prove the efficiency of taxpayer dollars being spent. Thank you for your attention to these matters and please know that our offices are willing to assist your efforts in whatever way possible.

Sincerely,



Tom Emmer  
Member of Congress



Pete Stauber  
Member of Congress



Michelle Fischbach  
Member of Congress



Brad Finstad  
Member of Congress

---

4 Johnson, Jerome, and Kristel Porter. "A Timely Time-out for the Blue Line Extension." *Star Tribune*, 23 Feb. 2025, [www.startribune.com/a-timely-time-out-for-the-blue-line-extension/601227277](http://www.startribune.com/a-timely-time-out-for-the-blue-line-extension/601227277).

5 "Blue Line Extension Chapter 3 Transportation." *Metropolitan Council*, 14 June 2024, [metro council.org/Transportation/Projects/Light-Rail-Projects/METRO-Blue-Line-Extension/Publications-And-Resources/Environmental/SDEIS/BLE\\_SDEIS\\_Chapter-3-Transportation.aspx#page=21](http://metro council.org/Transportation/Projects/Light-Rail-Projects/METRO-Blue-Line-Extension/Publications-And-Resources/Environmental/SDEIS/BLE_SDEIS_Chapter-3-Transportation.aspx#page=21).

6 "Northern Lights Express." *Northern Lights Express - MnDOT*, [www.dot.state.mn.us/nlx/#:~:text=In%20May%202023%2C%20the%20Minnesota,passenger%20cars%20for%20the%20service](http://www.dot.state.mn.us/nlx/#:~:text=In%20May%202023%2C%20the%20Minnesota,passenger%20cars%20for%20the%20service). Accessed 6 May 2025.

7 Hoggard, Corin. "Blame Game Escalates as Minnesota's Budget Forecast Worsens." *FOX 9 Minneapolis-St. Paul*, FOX 9 Minneapolis-St. Paul, 7 Mar. 2025, [www.fox9.com/news/blame-game-escalates-minnesotas-budget-forecast-worsens](http://www.fox9.com/news/blame-game-escalates-minnesotas-budget-forecast-worsens).