Passenger Rail in Minnesota

Passenger rail

Passenger rail is an important part of Minnesota's multimodal transportation system. Passenger trains connect rural and urban areas across Minnesota, the region and nation, increasing mobility, tourism and economic development.

Existing service

Minnesota's passenger rail services include:

- **Intercity trains** connect rural communities and cities across the state, region and nation. Typically, these routes include one or more round trips per day.
  - Borealis[SM] (Twin Cities-Milwaukee-Chicago)
  - Empire Builder[SM] (Chicago to Seattle and Portland via Minnesota)
- **Heritage and tourist railroads** offer trips through scenic areas.
  - Lake Superior & Mississippi Railroad (Duluth to New Duluth, MN)
  - North Shore Scenic Railroad (Duluth to Two Harbors, MN)
  - Osceola & St. Croix Valley Railway (Osceola WI, to Dresser, WI and Marine on Saint Croix, MN)
- **Commuter trains** connect suburbs with the core city in large metropolitan areas. Typically, these routes offer frequent service for workers and events in the core city.
  - Northstar commuter rail service was suspended by Metro Transit effective Jan. 5, 2026. In its place, Metro Transit is operating an expanded bus service.

Light rail and streetcars are other forms of rail-based transportation. While both operate on tracks, they are different from intercity passenger rail. Both are forms of urban mass transit, similar to transit buses, and their purpose is to move people around large cities.

Current studies

MnDOT works with partners across the region to study the potential expansion of intercity passenger rail service in the Midwest. This includes potential new corridors as well as increasing service on existing routes. These efforts are guided by the State Rail Plan.

- Twin Cities-Duluth/Superior Corridor/Northern Lights Express (NLX) (new route)
- Twin Cities-Eau Claire Corridor (new route)
  - Project is sponsored by the Chippewa-St. Croix Passenger Rail Commission
- Twin Cities-Milwaukee-Chicago Corridor
  - Projects are sponsored by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation
    - Additional frequency of the Borealis (existing route via La Crosse)
    - New route via Madison and Eau Claire
- Chicago-Seattle Corridor (new route via Minnesota, southern North Dakota and southern Montana)
  - Project is sponsored by Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority
- Twin Cities-Fargo/Moorhead Corridor

Current construction projects

- Twin Cities-Milwaukee-Chicago Passenger Rail Infrastructure Project

Related links

- More about rail in Minnesota
- State Rail Plan
- Rail safety
- Freight planning
- All Aboard Minnesota
- Amtrak
- Association of American Railroads
- High Speed Rail Alliance
- Midwest Interstate Passenger Rail Commission
- Federal Railroad Administration
- U.S. Department of Transportation

Employee Resources