

# MnDOT: Area highway projects face delays

Owatonna 06/12/02

■ In all, 163 projects are being delayed

By KATIE CAMPBELL  
Press staff writer

OWATONNA — Minnesota Department of Transportation officials pointed to 15 years of under-funding and inflation as the main reason for announcing delays in 163 road construction projects across the state.

"I think a lot of it is smoke, but if we don't get a transportation package then it'll be problem," Sen. Dick Day (R-Owatonna) said. "We didn't pass transportation, therefore everything has to be set back."

The state Senate and House failed to agree on a transportation bill in the last legislative session because the House supported a gas tax that only funded roads while the Senate wanted gas tax revenue to support roads and transit.

MnDOT representatives also explained that inflation will increase costs of many of the delayed projects. For example, costs for delayed construction on Highway 14 between Owatonna and Dodge Center will increase by about \$5 million with two years of inflation.

Mayer Pete Connor expressed his disappointment in MnDOT's announcement to slow progress on expanding Highway 14, the most dead-end two-lane highway in the state.



A car drives past on the Highway 45 bridge over Highway 14.

Press photo by Renée Jones

"If we can't get anyone to agree (on a transportation bill), then there's going to be consequences," Connor said. "All I know is for a program I'm passionate about, we basically got stiffed."

Both Day and Rep. Connie Ruth (R-Owatonna) felt confident that if a transportation package was approved in the next legislative session that projects impacted by MnDOT's proposed delays would be started on time. MnDOT spokesperson Brian Jergenson said he hoped that projects could continue as planned if the state legislature passes a transportation bill or if the U.S. legislature allocated funds to Minnesota trans-

portation projects.

Many of the Highway 14 and Highway 52 road construction projects near Rochester that were not impacted will be funded by federal dollars.

Day and Ruth also pointed out that construction projects are often delayed, and Jergenson too noted delays as a typical part of the construction process. "But it's important for the public to be aware of the reality that a lot of projects aren't going to take place because they don't have the funding," Jergenson said.

He said when a transportation package wasn't passed "we realized that we would have to make

some minor and major adjustments."

Rep. Ruth said she felt that MnDOT's announcement could just be a scare tactic. "I'm afraid these things become very political. During a campaign year, it's easy to say that 'We don't do this and we don't do that' without telling the whole story," she said.

"I hope for more enthusiasm for transportation in the next session. (Transportation) seems to often take a back seat," Day said. "We're fine until January or February then we'll really be down the tubes."

■ Road projects in Owatonna, Rochester areas among hardest hit

By KATIE CAMPBELL  
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OWATONNA — Because of a lack of funding, the Minnesota Department of Transportation announced Tuesday that 163 road construction projects could be postponed or dropped across the state.

Road projects near Owatonna, Rochester and in the metropolitan area were highlighted as some of the hardest hit, according to Transportation Department Commissioner Elwyn Tinklenberg.

Thirty-six projects were slotted for delay in south eastern Minnesota. Road work on Highway 14 from Owatonna to Waseca was projected to begin in 2007, now it will be postponed until 2008 due to the lack of funds, MnDOT spokesperson Brian Jergenson said. This project is expected to begin in 2008 and finish in 2013.

Replacement of a bridge at the interchange between Highway 14 and County Road 45 will be postponed from 2006 to 2007. Construction on Highway 14 between Owatonna and Dodge Center will be delayed two years, from 2010 until 2012. Expansion of interchange ramps and Straight River Bridges at the intersection of Highway 14 and Interstate 35 has been delayed from 2007 to 2008.

An interchange between Highway 14, Interstate 35 and County Road 7 was due to begin construction in 2008, but has been deferred until 2010. The third stage of construction on Highway 14 from County Road 18 to County Road 7 in Owatonna would have started 2009, but is delayed two years.

Current construction on the segment of Highway 14 south of Owatonna near Highway 218 will not be affected and is due to be completed in November 2003. Road work on Highway 14 between Eagle Lake and Janesville will be completed by the end of 2004.