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**Partnership Elects Owatonna's Les Abraham as President for 2011**

*New President Calls on Governor, Legislature and Congress to Move Project Forward*

The U.S. Highway 14 Partnership on Monday elected Owatonna City Council Member Les Abraham as President for 2011. The unanimous election came during the Partnership's 2011 annual membership meeting at the Owatonna Arts Center.

"I am honored and ready to serve the constituents of southern Minnesota as President of the Highway 14 Partnership. The completion of Highway 14 has been a top priority of mine, and the people of southern Minnesota, for years. The strong leadership at the head of the Partnership has brought us far, and I am eager to continue their hard work."

Abraham takes over the Partnership at a key moment in Highway 14's completion. The state of Minnesota is nearing completion of the environmental impact statements (EIS) for both the Owatonna to Dodge Center expansion, and the North Mankato to New Ulm expansion. In 2009, the Minnesota Legislature passed legislation requiring these EIS be completed by the end of 2010. Although the legislation was vetoed for reasons unrelated to Highway 14, then-Governor Tim Pawlenty directed MnDOT to follow the EIS provisions for Highway 14. Completion of the EIS means the project is ready for the purchase of right-of-way and construction, pending funding.

"I commend MnDOT's efforts in moving toward quick completion of the EIS. Finishing the EIS means there are no more reasons to delay any state or federal funding for this project. We know where the route will be, and the community and local businesses are ready for expansion. Governor Dayton and our new legislative leaders in St. Paul and Washington need to do what's right and fix Highway 14 now."

Council Member Abraham was first elected to the Owatonna City Council in 1996, and is currently the Council President. A veteran, Abraham has worked as an engineer, public safety official and is a Board member of the Credit Union Supervisory Commission. Abraham succeeds former North Mankato Mayor Gary Zellmer, who will serve as Past President on the Board of Directors.

The U.S. Highway 14 Partnership is a public-private advocacy organization supporting the four-lane expansion of Trunk Highway 14 in southern Minnesota between New Ulm and Rochester. Formed in 1998, the Highway 14 Partnership lobbies at both the state and federal levels of government.

For more information, please contact J.D. Burton at 651-225-8840 or visit the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership website at [www.ushighway14.com](http://www.ushighway14.com).

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