



For Immediate Release: January 14, 2013

Contact: Amanda Duerr
acduerr@flaherty-hood.com
Cell: 651-208-2815
Office: 651-259-1928

PARTNERSHIP: THERE'S MUCH AT STAKE FOR HIGHWAY 14 IN 2013

Over 60 people representing cities, counties, townships, businesses, and organizations along the Highway 14 corridor gathered today in Owatonna for the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership's annual meeting to discuss the organization's goals for 2013.

The U.S. Highway 14 Partnership is an advocacy organization supporting the four-lane expansion of Highway 14 between Rochester and New Ulm. Two segments—from New Ulm to North Mankato and Owatonna to Dodge Center—need upgrading from two to four lanes.

Les Abraham, President of the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership, noted that a top priority is ensuring that Highway 14's four-lane expansion is put back into MnDOT's 20-year State Highway Investment Plan. This document will outline MnDOT's project spending for the next two decades. A draft is due in March and a final report in May.

"If Highway 14 is left out of the 20-year plan, progress will be stalled, our region's economic development will be hampered, and our safety will be jeopardized," said President Abraham. "It's especially concerning that even if future transportation funding were to become available, those funds couldn't go towards completing Highway 14 if the projects aren't included in the plan. That's why the Partnership will be reaching out to the Governor, MnDOT Commissioner Zelle, and legislators to stress the importance of Highway 14. I encourage concerned citizens to do the same."

Abraham also noted that as the legislature discusses transportation funding, Highway 14 must be part of the conversation.

"Highway 14 is an economic corridor that must be a consistent four lanes from Rochester to New Ulm to meet the needs of our citizens and businesses. This unsafe road has already taken too many lives, and our traffic counts, population, and industries are only expected to grow," said Abraham. "The longer we wait to finish the four lane expansion, the more expensive the projects get, the more unsafe the road becomes, and the more economic opportunity that is lost. We need to find a way to get this done now."

Congressman Tim Walz, a strong Highway 14 advocate at the federal level, addressed Partnership members at their meeting. Staff from the offices of U.S. Senators Al Franken and Amy Klobuchar were also in attendance.

A newly-elected Highway 14 corridor legislator, State Senator Vicki Jensen (DFL-Owatonna), also spoke to the membership. Due to the importance of completing Highway 14 to her constituents, she will serve on the Senate Transportation and Public Safety Committee.

At the meeting, New Ulm Mayor Robert “Bob” Beussman was elected Vice-President of the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership.

“I look forward to playing a more active role in advocating for Highway 14,” said Mayor Beussman, who previously served on the Partnership’s Board of Directors. “The expansion of this highway is critically important to my community. We have about 1,000 commercial trucks that are based in New Ulm, all of which are dependent on this unsafe and inadequate two-lane road. There’s no question that the delays of Highway 14 have a negative impact on our economic development.”

Moving forward, the Partnership will put the priorities and strategies discussed at the annual meeting into action through member communications and legislative advocacy.

###