



For Immediate Release
December 20, 2017

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Highway 14 advocates warn proposed changes to funding program would put Greater Minnesota projects at risk

ST. PAUL, MINN.—As the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) prepares to roll out a revised scoring system for the Corridors of Commerce highway funding program early next year, members of the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership are expressing concern that the new system could put Greater Minnesota projects like the Highway 14 expansion at a disadvantage.

“Corridors of Commerce has been a valuable source of funding for Highway 14 in recent years, but MnDOT’s proposed scoring system would put our ability to access those funds at risk,” said Karen Foreman, president of the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership and a member of the Mankato City Council.

The Partnership submitted [a formal letter to MnDOT officials](#) this week to outline its concerns with the proposed scoring system and other changes that are being considered as to how MnDOT will allocate the \$400 million in Corridors of Commerce funding passed by the Legislature last spring.

The Partnership’s biggest qualm with the new system is that, if implemented as proposed, it will award more points to highway projects that connect to the Twin Cities metro area than projects that connect regional trade centers in Greater Minnesota to one another, such as Highway 14.

“Under MnDOT’s plan, highways that go through Eden Prairie or Wayzata would score higher than a highway that connects to Rochester or Mankato,” Foreman said. “For those who live and work along the corridor, Highway 14 is the lifeblood of our communities and economies. A scoring system that handicaps a corridor like Highway 14 from the outset belies the priorities of the Corridors of Commerce program.”

The Partnership is also concerned that a push by some metro-area interests may lead MnDOT to consider lowering Greater Minnesota’s share of Corridors of Commerce funding. Since the program was created in 2013, Corridors of Commerce funding has been divided 50-50 between Greater Minnesota and the metro area. Although the Legislature did not discuss making any changes to the funding distribution during its last session, MnDOT recently began soliciting feedback on whether the 50-50 split should remain.

“The Highway 14 Partnership is strongly opposed to any efforts to deviate from the 50-50 split,” Foreman said. “If MnDOT chooses to move toward an arrangement that favors one area of the state over another, it would be detrimental to not only Highway 14, but other Greater Minnesota projects as well.”

Foreman continued, “Agencies should look for ways to make the best use of their funding, but that should not include moving away from historic norms in a way that pits regions of the state against one another and results in state government picking economic winners and losers.”

The U.S. Highway 14 Partnership is an advocacy organization supporting the four-lane expansion of Highway 14. Formed in 1998, the Highway 14 Partnership includes local governments, private businesses and other organizations across Southern Minnesota.

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