



## Our View: Highway safety takes a back seat

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— The notorious safety reputation of Highway 14 between North Mankato and New Ulm will likely remain intact for at least 20 years.

The MnDOT plan for significant improvements to the highway's safety from North Mankato to New Ulm did not make the local MnDOT district's 20-year plan, mainly because the state does not have enough money to fund all the needed projects.

That a dangerous road like Highway 14 will get virtually no major improvement money is illustrative of just how desperately transportation is underfunded in Minnesota.

In fact, much of MnDOT's plan calls for improving state highways that are basically crumbling. Even with investments of \$1 billion over the next 20 years for the Mankato region's roads, MnDOT will be \$500 million short of what it needs. That means the percentage of miles of principal highways in the district with roads deemed "good" will decline from today's 73.5 percent to 46.4 percent in 2018. Non-principal roads, 67 percent good today, will bottom out at 51 percent in 2015 before rising modestly.

But the biggest disappointment is that Highway 14 from North Mankato to New Ulm will not be on the list for improvements for at least 20 years. Southern Minnesota residents waited an awful long time for that road to be re-designed and expanded, if only for safety reasons.

It's been five years since MnDOT produced its scoping document for Highway 14 between North Mankato and New Ulm. That document concluded: "Improvements to the highway between New Ulm and North Mankato are needed to address issues related to safety, traffic congestion, increases in truck traffic and highway access." A draft environmental impact statement was completed in December of 2007. In September 2008 MnDOT announced it would continue to study alternative routes for the project, but noted construction was not anticipated for "several years."

The highway's fatality record is nothing short of catastrophic. Since the mid-1980s, some 145 people have been killed on the highway dubbed Minnesota's most dangerous. From 2005 to 2007, more than a handful have died in accidents between North Mankato and New Ulm alone. State records show 75 percent of the deaths from 2000 to 2005 occurred on two lane stretches of the road, like that from North Mankato to New Ulm.

[Click here to see accident map.](#)

The Highway 14 Partnership, a group of 21 municipalities and 55 private sector members have long advocated for making the route from New Ulm to Rochester fully four lanes to support the 45,000 people and businesses who use the road every day.

Luckily some heavy lobbying by that group and others in the last couple of years stopped a planned delay of widening the road from Waseca to Owatonna. Those projects will be completed in a few years.

But legislators and the governor need to make the piece from North Mankato to New Ulm just as safe. Safety shouldn't be predicated on which part of the highway one uses or lives near.

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