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Franken hears Hwy. 14 concerns

Highway 14 Partnership meets at New Ulm City Hall

By Fritz Busch Staff Writer

POSTED: August 25, 2010

NEW ULM - On a whirlwind tour of southern Minnesota Tuesday, Sen. Al Franken learned about one of the state's most dangerous roads at a Highway 14 Partnership meeting in the New Ulm City Council Chambers.

Over the past 25 years, more than 150 people have died on the highway that curves over 265 miles of farmland from the South Dakota border to Winona.

State records show that in recent years, 75 percent of the deaths happened on two-lane stretches of road.

After more than 40 years in process, a preferred route for upgrading the highway to four lanes from New Ulm to North Mankato has been designed.

An alignment revised in February includes a cloverleaf of sorts at the Highway 14-15 junction, improved exits and entrances at the County Road 37 and 6 junctions, a northern Courtland bypass and a southern Nicollet bypass.

No timeline on the project has been set.

According to the Partnership, there were 209 crashes between New Ulm and Mankato from 1996 to 2000.

Forecasted daily traffic from New Ulm to Mankato was 5,000 to 8,700 in 2006. By 2025, it was forecast from 9,000 to 12,800.

There were 195 crashes between Owatonna and Dodge Center from 2001 to 2005, 14 of which were fatal or resulted in incapacitating injuries.

Franken said highway hazards were pointed out to him by Blue Earth County Engineer Al Forsberg on his trip from Mankato to New Ulm.

In Mankato, Franken discussed efforts to create jobs and economic development with the Region 9 Development Commission.

"In Minnesota, prosperity is made of education, research and design plus infrastructure. I want to partner with you," Franken said.

Owatonna City Councilor Lee Abraham said two people from Owatonna died on Highway 14 in the last two months.

North Mankato Mayor Gary Zellmer said the Partnership is trying to scrape together money from all available sources to upgrade the highway to four lanes between New Ulm and Dodge Center.

Franken said his staff is trying to find ways to complete an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on the New Ulm to North Mankato segment.

"We have a deficit but we need to make smart investments like this," Franken said.

Zellmer said State Rep. Terry Morrow of St. Peter demanded to meet with the Highway 14 Partnership regarding state funding for the project after a 21-year-old Mankato man recently died on the highway on his way to a Minnesota National Guard weekend drill.

New Ulm City Councilor Ken RockVam called Highway 14 a commerce and human corridor.

"New Ulm's (AMPI) butter goes to both coasts," RockVam said.

Franken said without partnerships, such projects won't get done.

"I'm all ears. Thanks for coming," he added.

Dean Mathiowetz of Mathiowetz Construction of Leavenworth, which is working on the Waseca to Owatonna four-lane project, asked Franken to push for funding to do the New Ulm to North Mankato upgrade to keep his employees busy over the coming years.

The latest project cost estimate was \$380 million.

Article Photos



Staff photo by Fritz Busch
From left, North Mankato Mayor Gary Zellmer and Sen. Al Franken participate in a discussion about the U.S. Highway 14 upgrade Tuesday in New Ulm City Council Chambers.

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