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Highway 14 project OK'd

Improvements will include construction of interchange at intersection of Highway 14 and County Road 41

January 12, 2011 - By Josh Moniz Staff Writer

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NORTH MANKATO - At long last work will begin on improving the Mankato to New Ulm section of U.S. Highway 14.

Rep. Terry Morrow, DFL- St. Peter, announced Tuesday that the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) had authorized the project.

The improvements will include the construction of an interchange at the intersection of Highway 14 and County Road 41 as well as realignment and widening of a few miles on the highway. The exact location has not yet been set, but it is expected that it will connect to the section of highway that extends from North Mankato.

MnDOT has not yet announced a formal timeline for the project or cost project. Previous estimates of the cost of the interchange have been placed between \$27 million and \$35 million.

The interchange is considered the first step in making the section of two-lane road to New Ulm into a four-lane highway.

The dangers of Highway 14 received statewide attention last fall after a Mankato Free Press investigation showed that the two-lane section of the highway had a 94 percent higher fatal crash rate than the state average.

State records show that in previous years, 75 percent of the deaths on Highway 14 occurred on the two-lane road between Mankato and New Ulm.

The Highway 14 Partnership, which includes cities affected by Highway 14, petitioned MnDOT to improve the roadway. New Ulm has played an important role in the Partnership.

New Ulm Mayor Bob Beussman, who has taken over former mayor Joel Albrecht's position on the Partnership's Board of Directors, said Tuesday that MnDOT decision was the best news he had heard in a long time.

"This is absolutely great," said Beussman, "Let's keep this going as best we can."

Beussman said that the improvement was essential to New Ulm's economic future and need to allow sufficient use of vehicles to transport goods from New Ulm businesses.

Beussman also reflected on Highway 14 fatalities. He said that even though he was glad for the coming improvements, he was sad that it took a large loss of life to get the state's attention.

"For me there has been way too many serious accidents and fatalities just in that one little spot at the 14 and 15 interchange," said Beussman, "Let's get this solved."

(Josh Moniz can be emailed an jmoniz@nujournal.com)

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