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Regional Leaders Advocate for Highway 14 in MnDOT's 20-Year Plan

The Minnesota House Transportation Policy Committee today heard from local government and business community representatives on the importance of completing Highway 14 for the region's safety and economic growth.

Before the committee was H.F. 211, authored by Rep. Kathy Brynaert of Mankato. This bill directs MnDOT to list the four-lane expansion of Highway 14 in the department's 20-year plan, which is scheduled to be released in August. The 20-year State Highway Investment Plan will prioritize the allocation of state and federal transportation funding.

"Too many people are needlessly losing their lives on Highway 14," said Owatonna Mayor Tom Kuntz, who referenced the 52 fatalities and 41 serious injury crashes that occurred over the past decade on Highway 14 between Rochester and New Ulm. "Highway 14 must be included in the plan and the Department needs to start allocating resources towards its completion. We don't want to waste the prior investments that have been made towards the expansion, let alone risk the safety of drivers or our region's economic growth."

There remain two segments of Highway 14 in need of an upgrade from two to four lanes: from Owatonna to Dodge Center and Nicollet to New Ulm. Governor Dayton last summer committed to expanding Highway 14 between North Mankato and Nicollet in 2017-18.

"A Safety Audit performed by MnDOT last spring identified many unsafe intersections along Highway 14," noted New Ulm Mayor Bob Beussman. "This audit recommended that the Highway 14 and Highway 15 intersection be upgraded to an interchange when the Department replaces the abutting New Ulm Bridge in 2018. So far, this necessary safety improvement remains unplanned and unfunded by MnDOT. For the flow of commerce in and out of New Ulm, and the safety of area drivers, we need to make sure this project and the full four-lane expansion is included in the 20-year plan."

Testifiers highlighted the projected population and economic growth along Highway 14. According to the State Demographer, five of the counties along the corridor will experience population growth ranging from 13-33% by 2030. According to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), by 2020, special freight trucking will increase 50-57%, building equipment contractors by 43-54%, medical offices 30-32%, and general freight trucking by 21%.

“This population and economic growth is welcome, but will also add to the traffic volume, congestion, and safety concerns along Highway 14,” said Patrick Baker, Director of Government and Institutional Affairs for Greater Mankato Growth. “As our region continues to grow and become an even bigger contributor to the state’s economy, it will be critically important to ensure that we have adequate infrastructure to ensure future economic opportunities and improve safety along the corridor.”

H.F. 211 was laid over for possible inclusion in a transportation policy omnibus bill. Another bill hearing on Highway 14 is scheduled for February 27, when the House Transportation Finance Committee will take up H.F. 210, which appropriates funds for completing the four-lane expansion of Highway 14.

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