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### **PARTNERSHIP: HIGHWAY 14 MUST BE PRIORITY IN MNDOT'S STATEWIDE PLAN**

Business and local government members of the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership strongly advocated for the four-lane expansion of Highway 14 at a Mankato meeting seeking public input on Minnesota's highway investments. The Minnesota Department of Transportation is in the process of developing its 20-year Minnesota Statewide Highway Investment Plan (MnSHIP)-- which will outline the state's spending for the next two decades-- and is hosting a series of stakeholder meetings throughout the state to hear Minnesotans' transportation priorities.

"If Highway 14 isn't included in the 20-year plan, it's a deathblow to our businesses and the safety of our residents," said Les Abraham, President of the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership and Owatonna City Councilor. "We urge our area's citizens to join in contacting MnDOT to let them know that fixing this highway is a priority and needs to be listed in the plan."

Partnership members stressed both the safety and economic need for completing the four-lane expansion of the two unfinished segments of Highway 14-- North Mankato to New Ulm and Dodge Center to Owatonna. Since 2001, there have been 43 fatalities and 47 serious injuries on Highway 14 between New Ulm and Rochester. Both segments of unfinished highway have fatality rates above the statewide average of 0.8; with a rate of 2.2 from North Mankato to New Ulm and 1.5 from Dodge Center to Owatonna.

"Highway 14 is a dangerous road that needs to be improved now. How many more people must needlessly lose their lives for the state to realize this? If Highway 14 is not in the 20-year statewide plan, it signals that decades of promises and prior investments in this highway have been for not," said Drew Campbell, Blue Earth County Commissioner.

The Partnership also noted that a four-lane expansion is necessary to meet the region's population growth. Traffic projections show that average daily traffic along Highway 14 will increase by 60-80% by 2025 between North Mankato and New Ulm and more than double between Owatonna and Dodge Center by 2030.

“By ignoring the needs on Highway 14, Minnesota is not only losing lives, but economic opportunities,” noted Ronda Allis, Director of Community Development at the Region 9 Development Commission. “The heavy truck traffic and difficult intersections along Highway 14 make it hard to attract businesses to our corridor, as they know this road will be an impediment to moving their goods and providing their services. This highway no longer meets the needs of our growing communities and economies and is holding our development back.”

Final environmental impact statements (EIS) were prepared for the two segments of Highway 14 in 2010 (Dodge Center to Owatonna) and 2011 (North Mankato to New Ulm). If no work occurs on the projects within three years, MnDOT would have to reevaluate the environmental impacts of the roadwork, causing further delay and cost increases to the projects.

“The clock is ticking on these environmental impact statements. Why allow these documents to grow dormant and increase the taxpayer cost of finishing Highway 14?” questioned Abraham. “We’ve wasted enough time—let’s get to work fixing it now.”

The U.S. Highway 14 Partnership also plans to attend MnDOT’s stakeholder engagement meeting in Rochester on October 17 and continue its advocacy for the completion of Highway 14 and the projects’ inclusion in the 20-year plan.

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