

Klobuchar talks progress

Wendy Reuer

Posted: Tuesday, August 18, 2009 10:15 pm



Mayor Tom Kutz welcomes Sen. Amy Klobuchar to the Owatonna Fire Hall Tuesday afternoon. Klobuchar was in town to discuss the progress on the Highway 14 project.

By WENDY REUER

wreuer@owatonna.com

OWATONNA — U.S. Senator Amy Klobuchar and her staff got a first-hand glimpse of how dangerous the two-lane rural Minnesota highways can be, as they witnessed a hay rack fall just in front of their vehicle in southern Minnesota.

Klobuchar visited with the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership at the Owatonna Fire Hall on Wednesday, to discuss where the project is, and where it is going. The Partnership is made up of

city and county representatives across the Highway 14 corridor. Representatives have been striving to make Highway 14— which has been dubbed Minnesota’s most dangerous highway — into a four-lane expressway from New Ulm to Winona.

Highway 14 Partnership President and North Mankato mayor Gary Zellmer said finishing the sections from Owatonna to Dodge Center, as well as that from New Ulm to North Mankato, will cost about \$600 million.

The section from Waseca to Owatonna, which began this year, will be completed in 2012.

“The smaller it gets, the more obvious it needs to be funded,” Klobuchar said.

The visit comes just as Klobuchar prepares to make Minnesota projects a priority in next year’s federal transportation bill, which will determine funding availability for state projects across the country.

Owatonna city administrator Kris Busse said Klobuchar’s near miss on the highway is exactly what other lawmakers need to see.

“I think if you could get more people driving on this road, we wouldn’t have a problem getting funding,” Busse said.

For Owatonna, finishing the section between the city and Dodge Center, which has no designated funding, it is a matter of economic development.

“In greater Minnesota, the highways are the lifeblood for economic development. This is critical,” Busse said.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation has vowed to finish Environmental Impact Statements for both the



August 18 – 23, 2009

Welcome!
Food!
Rides!
Livestock!
Grandstand!

SCFF
Steele County Free Fair
LARGEST MN COUNTY FAIR
Owatonna, MN

MIGHTY FINE
2009

[Click Here](#)

Owatonna-east section and the section from New Ulm to North Mankato by spring, after losing out on the chance for President Barack Obama's stimulus money this year because the project was not ready for construction.

At hearing this, Klobuchar sighed at the missed opportunity and said she understands the urgency in pushing for the last remaining sections of Highway 14 to be a priority at the state and federal levels.

Klobuchar said she plans to make funding for the remaining projects a priority in the next year.

Wendy Reuer can be reached at 444-1565.