

# Post-Bulletin

## Legislators renew push for widening U.S. 14

Sat, Feb 14, 2009 PB Online

---

By [Heather J. Carlson](#)  
Post-Bulletin, Rochester MN

Fed up with years of waiting for money to upgrade U.S. 14, area lawmakers are pushing to get the project fast-tracked.

Senate Minority Leader Dave Senjem, R-Rochester, has authored a bill that would provide more than \$650 million to acquire right-of-way and finish expanding the highway from two lanes to four lanes from New Ulm, Minn., to Rochester. The Minnesota Department of Transportation would be required to complete its environmental studies along the corridor by the end of this year. A similar bill has been introduced in the house by Rep. Terry Morrow, DFL-St. Paul.

Senjem said he knows the bill is probably a long shot given the state's massive budget deficit, but he said it is time this project becomes a statewide priority.

"We know it's swimming up stream, and we know you shouldn't probably legislate highway projects," he said, "But if that's what we have to do, that's what we'll do."

### Construction work

In recent years, construction work has been done along the corridor, including most recently an expansion from Jaynesville, Minn., toward Waseca, Minn. Work is also slated to begin on a stretch from Waseca to Owatonna, which will include a new interchange and highway realignment in Owatonna. Other stretches, including Dodge Center to Owatonna, are not fully funded. This stretch also is undergoing an environmental study that is expected to be completed in a year. As part of Senjem's bill, that study would have to be completed by Dec. 31.

MnDOT spokeswoman Kristine Hernandez said it would be difficult to speed up the study because it is a process with strict requirements.

"I don't know how you could speed that process up or, legislatively, you could force the agencies to do that," Hernandez said.

### Sense of urgency

The efforts in St. Paul come as the U.S. Hwy. 14 Partnership is ramping up its campaign to get the project finished. The partnership -- a coalition of cities and townships along U.S. 14 -- has a simple slogan: "Fix it now!"

"To be driving on these ancient, antiquated roads is just becoming far too dangerous and a detriment to growth for all these communities," said North Mankato Mayor Gary Zellmer, president of the partnership.

Since the mid-1980s, more than 145 people have been killed in crashes on the highway, according to the partnership.

Adding to the sense of urgency is concern that the project could miss out on federal stimulus dollars. U.S. 14 is not included in MnDOT's list of projects eligible for federal dollars. Hernandez said the project is not "shovel ready," so

it failed to qualify for most of those dollars. There is still the potential some federal funds might be available for the highway, she said.

Olmsted County Board member Jim Bier, who serves on the partnership's board, said the goal is to put a spotlight on the project and speed up its construction.

"I'm not holding my breath that the whole thing is going to get magically funded," Bier said. "But we want to be in the game."

---

*Post-Bulletin Company, L.L.C.*  
*www.postbulletin.com*