



October 27, 2009

Commissioner Tom Sorel  
Minnesota Department of Transportation  
395 John Ireland Blvd  
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Commissioner Sorel:

On behalf of the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership, I write to express our concern with the Department of Transportation's 20-year Highway Investment Plan, released in August. Specifically, we are concerned the Department continues to view the completion of the four lane expansion of Highway 14 between New Ulm and Rochester as a low priority for the next several decades.

As you are aware, the 20-year investment plan identifies two unfinished Highway 14 projects as mid- to long-range investment plans for the Department over the next 20 years. Specifically, the District 6 plan identifies the Dodge Center to Owatonna project as a long-range priority of the Department, scheduled tentatively for construction sometime between 2019 and 2028, contingent on funding being available. Long-range planning is defined as "a very rough, long-term outlook on revenues and investment priorities." Further, this segment is only identified for "partial" funding, with the connotation that the segment will be completed in piecemeal fashion, if at all.

In District 7, the Department has cataloged two portions of the North Mankato to New Ulm expansion project for investment through 2028. The first, CSAH 17 to North Mankato, is slated for investment prior to 2018; the second, New Ulm to Courtland, is slated for investment at some point between 2019 and 2028. Similar to District 6, the Highway 14 expansion here would be completed in a piecemeal fashion. Additionally, the District 7 Investment Plan notes that "statewide performance targets (in District 7) are actually being met on this corridor, and the remaining improvements do not show up as performance-based needs."

The conclusions reached by the Department are disappointing, and unacceptable. After so many years, how could these two Highway 14 projects still remain a low-end priority for the Department? How many more deaths on Highway 14 must occur before the Department considers the completion of Highway 14 expansion a top priority?

As a matter of fairness, we'd like to give your Department an opportunity to clarify the factors behind the investment plan's conclusions. Specifically, we would appreciate a detailed answer to the following questions:

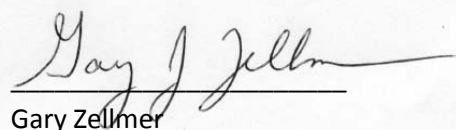
- What criteria did the Department use in determining the Owatonna to Dodge Center segment does not merit investment until the 2019 to 2028 time period? How was this criteria applied to these projects, and how did these projects "score" in relation to similar 2-to-4 lane expansion projects in Minnesota?
- What criteria did the Department use to determine the New Ulm to North Mankato segment merits piecemeal funding investments through 2028? What criteria were used to conclude a piecemeal approach was more prudent than a complete expansion? How did these projects "score" in relation to similar 2-to-4 lane expansion projects in Minnesota?
- Why has the Department chosen to provide only a "partial" investment for the Owatonna to Dodge Center segment, and what part of this segment would be expanded? What criteria were used to make this "partial" funding decision?
- How are "statewide performance targets" being met for Highway 14 in District 7, and what are these performance targets? What role do these "statewide performance targets" play in determining the short- and long-range investment decisions of the Department?
- What are the state's "performance-based needs", and why do the remaining improvements along Highway 14 not "show-up" as a performance-based need? What role do these "performance-based needs" play in determining the short- and long-range investment decisions of the Department?

The Partnership recognizes the difficult challenges facing the Department in their efforts to meet the growing demands of travelers throughout the state. Furthermore, we fully acknowledge there are limited resources available to the state for transportation projects, and that many projects will go unfunded. Nevertheless, the Partnership does not view the Department's recommendations in their 20-year investment plan as ones based on funding shortfalls alone; rather, we view the recommendations as ones based on priorities. And, from our perspective, the Department's priorities are wrong.

It is increasingly difficult to explain to southern Minnesotans why a highway feared by so many people, for so long a time, simply can't or won't be fixed. Our residents wonder how much longer they have to wait to fix Highway 14. We would appreciate your assistance in answering these questions.

Thank you for your prompt reply, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gary J. Zellmer". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

Gary Zellmer

Mayor, City of North Mankato  
President, U.S. Highway 14 Partnership

Cc:

Nelrae Succio, MnDOT

Rep. Tony Cornish  
Rep. Kathy Brynaert  
Rep. Randy Demmer  
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Rep. Kory Kath  
Rep. Tina Liebling  
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