



Our View: Progress on Highway 14 welcome

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— For decades, residents of southern Minnesota have pointed out the dangers of traveling Highway 14. Now, it appears those calls will be finally heeded.

State and federal officials have Highway 14 on their near term radar. Just this week, the Minnesota Department of Transportation committed to finishing the environmental impact statement on that part of the highway considered most dangerous: the stretch from North Mankato to New Ulm.

That push came in part from legislation authored by Rep. Terry Morrow, DFL-St. Peter, that other area legislators of both political stripes supported to require the EIS get done soon. Although Gov. Tim Pawlenty vetoed the transportation bill, the governor supported the request if there was some flexibility for MnDOT in completing the EIS.

This week, MnDOT Commissioner Tom Sorel committed MnDOT to completing the EIS by December of 2010. There will be public hearings this summer on the road from North Mankato to New Ulm.

Getting the EIS done will improve the highway's prospect for federal funding through the transportation re-authorization bill going through Congress this year and possibly next. Congressman Tim Walz, D.-1st District, has asked for \$100 million for the project.

The preliminary EIS done on Highway 14 from North Mankato to New Ulm shows it has an accident rate three times that state average. That, of course, should be unacceptable to residents and businesses of southern Minnesota.

A completed EIS will also help the project by "shovel ready" should there be more stimulus money issued by the federal government. The project lost out on that money because it was not shovel ready during the first go-around of stimulus funding.

A completed EIS will also likely move the project up the list for state funding. The Highway 14 partnership, Southern Minnesota Advocates and cities and counties along the route have tirelessly pushed for improved safety and a four-lane road to help move commerce.

It looks like those efforts are now coming to fruition.

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