



North Mankato, MnDot locked in dispute

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— The Minnesota Department of Transportation and North Mankato, along with disagreeing about water, are also in conflict about a pair of roads.

There's an ongoing spat in which the city is threatening to push for an intersection on Highway 14, probably including stoplights, because of delays in state approval of funding for a new interchange at Highway 14 and Nicollet County Road 41.

And the city is considering legal action in another disagreement, claiming MnDOT turned over a defective piece of roadway and isn't taking responsibility for properly repairing it.

The Highway 14 issue isn't likely to come to a head until next year, when the city says it will push ahead with an at-grade intersection on the northwest side of town — an intersection that would apparently require stop lights on what is now a 65-mph freeway just to the east of the location.

City officials and MnDOT agree it really should be an interchange with ramps and an overpass. But MnDOT says it doesn't have the money required for the \$22 million to \$25 million project, and the city will need to find alternative funding or be patient. City officials say they need at least an intersection to serve industrial growth on that side of North Mankato.

The other issue involves a bumpy piece of Lor Ray Drive just south of the street's overpass of Highway 14. Built by MnDOT in the 1970s, the street was turned back to the city several years ago.

An experimental repair to the street surface in the 1990s, in which relatively thin concrete panels were poured atop the asphalt, turns out to have been something of a failure. Conceding there are problems, MnDOT is willing to finance some improvements — essentially replacing the worst concrete panels and grinding down others to make the road smooth again.

The city wants the section of road replaced down to the dirt below the asphalt, something MnDOT engineer Doug Haeder said would cost an estimated \$770,000.

"We don't really think that's a good use of state funds, to be removing a pavement that still has some life in it," Haeder said.

City Administrator Wendell Sande said MnDOT did repairs that were necessary on Lor Ray north of the overpass in 2000. The city now wants the south side done.

"One's been replaced," Sande said. "Our contention is MnDOT's got to do the other one."

Accepting the MnDOT plan would expose the city to ongoing repair costs, he said. The council has instructed the city attorney to explore the legal options for forcing the repairs or taking back possession of the road.

Haeder expects a compromise to be found before the issue ends up in court.

"I guess I'm always optimistic, and I think we will," he said.

Haeder also sees it as a coincidence the city and MnDOT seem to be in a rocky relationship.

"I see it as completely separate," he said of the various disputes. "The only thing that they have in common is money."

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Photos



A bumpy section of Lor Ray Drive in North Mankato, the result of a failed experiment by the Minnesota Department of Transportation, has the city hinting at possible legal action. The dispute is one of at least three between North Mankato and the transportation department. The Free Press