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## Senate panel OKs Hwy. 14 legislation

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ST. PAUL - The Senate Transportation Budget and Policy Division on Tuesday unanimously approved legislation that will mandate completion of two outstanding environmental impact statements along Highway 14 in southern Minnesota: one from New Ulm to North Mankato, a second from Owatonna to Dodge Center.

New Ulm Mayor Joel Albrecht testified in support of the legislation.

"For 13 years, I've been coming to the Capitol to talk to you about Highway 14, and for over 40 years we have been working on this project, yet MnDOT still can't get these environmental impact statements done," said Albrecht. "The only unfinished highway environmental impact statements older than 2 1/2 years are on Highway 14. That's unfair to southern Minnesota communities. The Legislature needs to just get this done."

The legislation, S.F. 1643, authored by Sen. Kathy Sheran (DFL - Mankato), would require that MnDOT complete the New Ulm-North Mankato and Dodge Center-Owatonna environmental impact statements by December 31, 2009. Once completed, the local communities and businesses along the corridor would be better prepared to begin planning for future growth along the corridor.

Also speaking in favor of the bill during the hearing was Senator Dick Day (R-Owatonna), who offered an amendment to include the bill in the Transportation Committee's policy omnibus bill. The amendment was approved by voice vote.

The transportation omnibus bill, with the Highway 14 language, now moves to the full Senate Finance Committee. Similar legislation was introduced in the House by Rep. Terry Morrow (DFL-St. Peter).

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