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Hwy. 14 Partnership sets policy, takes tough stance

By Ron Larsen Staff Writer

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OWATONNA - While the 2010 Legislative Policy Positions approved by U.S. Highway 14 Partnership members here Monday may seem like the group is taking a harder line on getting the Highway 14 expansion project finished, a spokesperson said the policy positions agreed upon by members represent "talking points" for the 2010 Minnesota Legislative Session.

However, the Partnership appeared to take a tough stance on getting the various outstanding segments finished. For example, at the top of the list is "obtain funds to complete the segment from TH14 from New Ulm to Co. Rd. 6 (west of North Mankato), with construction to begin in 2011 or earlier; [and] advocate for completion of the Environmental Impact Statement along this segment no later than December 31, 2010."

In the No. 2 spot is "obtain funds to complete the highway segment along TH14 from Nicollet County Road 6 to North Mankato with construction to begin in 2010 or earlier. Funding for this segment should include revenue dedicated to the TH14/CSAH 41 interchange."

Then, they follow with "obtain funds to complete the highway segment along TH14 from Owatonna to Dodge Center Bypass [Highway 218 to Hwy 56, West Junction] with construction to begin in 2011 or earlier; advocated for completion of Environmental Impact Statement along this segment no later than May 31, 2010."

This is followed by a directive to "obtain funds to complete the TH14/CSAH 12 interchange in Blue Earth County, with construction to begin in 2010; obtain funds to complete construction of highway shoulders and shoulder pavement along TH14 between St. Charles and Winona; obtain funds to be committed to the document development and draft Environmental Impact Statement for the TH14/TH169 interchange, [and] support the two-lane upgrade of Highway 14 west of New Ulm."

The idea is convince the Legislature "is to include the two projects along Highway 14 including the North Mankato-to-New Ulm expansion project are put into a statewide transportation plan which makes it a top priority for the [Minnesota] Department [of Transportation] in the upcoming couple of years," said Attorney J.D. Burton, the lead staffer on the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership account at Flaherty & Hood, the law firm that handles administrative details and lobbying for the Partnership.

"So, for example, if that bill was up and they wanted to hear from the Highway 14 Partnership we would tell them that, yes, we support this legislation as a policy position of ours."

And, the Partnership went on record that it "strongly opposes any reductions in state funding for Highway 14 or any delays in the Highway 14 environmental impact analysis and construction stages."

At the federal level, the Partnership went on record as calling for "expedited passage of a new federal surface transportation re-authorization bill, including the designation of the Highway 14 project between Owatonna and Dodge Center, the expansion project between New Ulm and North Mankato, the Highway 14 and CSAH 41 interchange, and the Highway 14 and CSAH 12 interchange as High Priority projects.

They also called for increased investments in rural road safety and authorization of an increase in the federal fuel tax. The Partnership also called for inclusion of Highway 14 projects in the Fiscal Year 2011 Transportation/HUD appropriations measures, including expansion of TH14 between Highway 218 in Owatonna to Highway 56 west of Dodge Center; expansion of TH14 between New Ulm and Co. Rd. 6, west of North Mankato; developing Nicollet Co. Rd. 6 to N. Mankato, including the TH14-CSAH 41 interchange, and the interchange of TH14 with CSAH 12 in Blue Earth County.

Also, the Partnership seeks "substantial federal funding for Highway 14 through the annual appropriations process, or other legislative measures."

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