

Highway 14 group testifies in St. Paul

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ST. PAUL — It's a small step, but members of the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership are hoping it's one in the right direction.

The Minnesota House of Representatives heard testimony Monday evening regarding a mandate to ensure that environmental impact statements along Highway 14 from Owatonna to Dodge Center and New Ulm to North Mankato be finished by the end of 2009. To do so, state funding will have to be allocated by the Minnesota Department of Transportation.



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“Every few months, MnDOT tells us they are going to complete these environmental impact statements by a certain date, and then, without fail, they are delayed another few months or longer,” said North Mankato Mayor and Highway 14 President Gary Zellmer, who testified in support of the bill. “Our communities can’t plan for the future with such delays and uncertainty. We need a commitment, and this bill will provide it.”

The current legislation is bill H.F. 1693 and is authored by Rep. Terry Morrow (DFL-St. Peter). The EIS studies must be completed before the projects can move along. A draft EIS study was completed in 2008 from Owatonna to Dodge Center and a design option was chosen in January. The EIS from Owatonna to Dodge Center would now have to be finalized before

right-of-way acquisition can begin.

Mike Millstead, Vice President of Ag Power in Owatonna, also testified Monday night.

“Ag Power Enterprises had two very successful years, but the agricultural business is cyclical, and we know a down-turn is likely coming,” Millstead said. “For us to build a new facility in a down year will be very difficult to manage, if at all. Continued delays in the Highway 14 project could impact the financial ability for our company to expand and grow.”

Members of the Highway 14 Partnership, which is made up of city, county and private representatives along the Highway 14 corridor, have been lobbying for years to expand the two-lane highway into a four-lane roadway from the eastern to western borders of Minnesota.

Construction that would turn the two-lane highway into a four-lane expressway from Waseca to Owatonna will begin this summer.

More information can be found at www.ushighway14.com.

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