

Post-Bulletin

MnDOT report shows \$1.5 million in unfunded roadwork

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Road construction needs in southeastern Minnesota are far outstripping the state's ability to pay for them, according to a new state report.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation released a 20-year plan this week that shows \$1.5 billion in unfunded needs for this area. Statewide, the plan estimates, the department has a \$50 billion shortfall over the next 20 years.

MnDOT spokeswoman Kristine Hernandez said the limited funds will mean a greater focus on preserving existing infrastructure and looking for short-term, less expensive options for fixing roadways.

"Some of these projects that are worthy and worthwhile but fall into the expansion category won't get funded right away because we have to focus on preservation," she said.

Local projects that are not currently funded include two proposed interchanges on U.S. 14 -- one at Olmsted County Road 104 and one in Byron; an interchange north of Pine Island on U.S. 52; and the two-to-four lane expansion of U.S. 63 between 37th Street and 55th Street in Rochester. Also failing to get funding is the two-to-four lane expansion of U.S. 14 from Owatonna to Dodge Center.

J.D. Burton, a lobbyist for the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership, said the organization is disappointed that the project is not funded. The partnership has been pushing to get the highway widened because of safety concerns.

"We certainly are troubled to learn that after so many years the state still has not made this a priority," Burton said, adding that the partnership is hoping to find other innovative ways to fund the project.

The emphasis on preservation comes after a report last year from the Office of the Legislative Auditor criticized the department for spending too much money on expansion projects. Projects that are slated to get dollars include three major repair/replacement projects for bridges that span the Mississippi River. They are the Interstate-90 bridge in Dresbach Township, the U.S. 43 bridge in Winona and the U.S. 63 bridge in Red Wing. In addition, Interstate 90 from Dexter to U.S. 63 is getting a concrete overlay this year.

There is some hope for projects that fail to make the regional funding list. A proposed interchange at Olmsted County Road 12 on U.S. 52 in Pine Island ended up getting awarded \$14.56 million in state transportation dollars.

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MnDOT 20-year Transportation Plan

<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/newsrels/09/08/21-20yearplan.html>

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