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### **Business and Community Leaders Highlight Concerns About Highway 14 at State Capitol**

Business and local government leaders from the Highway 14 corridor today went before the Minnesota Senate Transportation and Public Safety Budget Division to discuss the safety and economic concerns caused by U.S. Highway 14.

Testifiers emphasized the regional significance of Highway 14, which serves the hubs of Rochester, Owatonna, Waseca, Greater Mankato, and New Ulm. They called for a consistent four-lane corridor connecting these growing economic centers.

“The Greater Mankato area is experiencing strong growth in our economy, which will further increase the importance of Highway 14 as a regional economic corridor,” explained Jonathan Zierdt, President/CEO of Greater Mankato Growth. “Regional businesses that currently use Highway 14 for moving their goods and employees are becoming increasingly concerned about the delays and dangerous intersections presented with travel on this corridor. As our region continues to grow, it’s important that economic opportunities are not hampered by inadequate infrastructure.”

Representatives from Hy-Vee, Inc. and the Owatonna Area Chamber of Commerce and Tourism also noted the difficulties presented by the unfinished segments of Highway 14.

Aaron Lambrecht, a business owner from New Ulm, explained both his professional and personal safety concerns with Highway 14.

“My wife and I do not let our children ride the school bus because it would have to cross two lanes of Highway 14. We’ve rearranged our work schedules so we can drive them to and from school and avoid travel on Highway 14,” said Lambrecht, VP/COO of Shelter Products, Inc. “Further, as a business involved in the sales and delivery of building materials, we are hindered by Highway 14. Distributors along four-lane highways have a definite competitive economic advantage. We may have to look elsewhere if we want our company to grow.”

Legislation sponsored by State Sen. Vicki Jensen (DFL-Owatonna) appropriating funds for completing the four-lane expansion of Highway 14 was the committee's topic of discussion. Members also highlighted the importance of including Highway 14 in MnDOT's 20-year State Highway Investment Plan.

"As lawmakers consider investments in Minnesota's transportation infrastructure, the resources needed to complete Highway 14 must be part of the discussion," said Waseca Mayor Roy Srp. "The longer the four lane expansion of Highway 14 is put off, the more lives that will be lost, the more expensive these projects will become, and the more regional economic growth that will be forgone. MnDOT must include Highway 14 in its 20 year plan and the state must provide the funding to complete the four-lane corridor."

Sen. Jensen's bill (S.F. 168) was laid over for possible inclusion in an omnibus transportation finance bill.

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