

Walz pushes for Highway 14 funding

Wendy Reuer

Posted: Monday, May 11, 2009 10:31 pm



U.S. Rep. Tim Walz shakes the hand of Minnesota Rep. Kory Kath Monday as Owatonna City Council Member Les Abraham looks on. Walz stopped into Sette Sports Center in Owatonna to announce his request for federal funding for U.S. Highway 14.

By WENDY REUER

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OWATONNA — U.S. Congressman Tim Walz, was a little late arriving for a scheduled visit at Sette Sports in Owatonna on Monday — but with good reason.

He was stuck behind a line of about 30 cars on the two lane Highway 14 from Waseca to Owatonna.

But the reason he was late was exactly the reason Walz, DFL-Minn., arrived in the parking lot of Sette Sports Center, an Owatonna

business directly off of U.S. Highway 14.

Walz announced that he will be asking the federal government for \$103.1 million in funding for Highway 14, including \$35 million in funding for the Owatonna to Dodge Center section.

“There’s not one of us that hasn’t been touched by U.S. Highway 14,” Walz said. “If the determination is there, the EIS is done, we need to quit throwing out roadblocks.”

The Minnesota Department of Transportation is currently in the process of completing the final draft of the Environmental Impact Statement from Dodge Center to Owatonna. No funding has been scheduled federally or at the state level for the project to move forward.

The Surface Transportation Bill is currently being written by the U.S. congress and would allocate funds for specific projects across the country to be divided up by representation lines. The total bill is expected to allocate between \$450 billion and \$500 billion dollars to transportation projects around the country.

Walz said the Highway 14 project probably won’t get all of the funds he is proposing, but his request would help it remain on the front burner. It is a push in the right direction for U.S. Highway 14 Partnership representatives, who have been urging the state and federal levels to continue movement on the project.

“The project started in the (1970s) and here it is 2010, and it’s still not done,” said mayor Tom Kuntz.

Rep. Randy Demmer, R-Hayfield, who represents

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Dodge County at the state Legislature, said, as someone who often drives the road, that he, too, sees the need to make that stretch of Highway 14 a four-lane road. He said it would help safe travel for the abundant agricultural vehicles which also commonly use the road.

Walz added that the Highway 14 Partnership has been especially helpful in making movement to receive funds, as a transparent coalition brought of local leaders. Walz is stressing the need for transparency in all upcoming projects.

“For the first time, it’ll be totally transparent. (The proposed bill) will be up on the Web site. We’re totally

committed to this,” Walz said.

Walz said he is hopeful the bill will be finished and signed into effect by President Obama by the end of the year or early 2010.

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