

Published on *Owatonna Peoples Press: News, sports, entertainment and advertising from Owatonna, Steele County, Minnesota* (<http://owatonna.com>)

[Home](#) > Businesses, officials tout benefits of Hwy. 14 project


# Businesses, officials tout benefits of Hwy. 14 project

By *OPP Editorial*

Created 03/09/2012 - 21:58

Submitted by OPP Editorial on Fri, 03/09/2012 - 21:58

By REBECCA RODENBORG, [rrodenborg@owatonna.com](mailto:rrodenborg@owatonna.com) <sup>[1]</sup>

 [3.10-hwy-14-2.jpg](#) <sup>[2]</sup>

Owatonna City Council President Les Abraham gave opening remarks at a press conference where local business leaders voiced their support for the future of the Highway 14 expansion project. (Rebecca Rodenberg/People's Press)

OWATONNA — With the sounds of nails being pounded into boards echoing behind him, Mike Veldman told a crowd outside the under-construction Ag Power facility how plans for a new Highway 14 drew company officials to choose a plot of land near the proposed highway for their new farm machinery facility.

"As time went on and the discussion about Highway 14 went on and on, it was recognized by us that, from an economic standpoint and economic function of our business, we need to be on the new Highway 14," said Veldman, owner of Ag Power Enterprises. "That's why we're building where we're building. We are here because of the access the four-lane Highway 14 would give. It just makes a lot of sense."

Veldman was just one of the local business people to speak about the importance of the proposed Highway 14 expansion through Owatonna during a press conference Friday morning. They called on Gov. Mark Dayton to continue supporting Highway 14 by directing the Minnesota Department of Transportation to put the four-lane expansion projects between North Mankato to New Ulm and Owatonna to Dodge Center in the state's upcoming 20-year transportation plan.

Mayor Tom Kuntz pointed to numerous economic development projects that have come to Owatonna because of Highway 14 and Interstate 35.

"Owatonna has been very privileged, and location, location, location is the key to all of that," Kuntz said.

Veldman agreed with Kuntz, adding that the expansion project would bring more development to the area.

"From our vision and how it relates to the future development or the continued development of

the Highway 14 projects, the governor and the state would be making a big mistake if they did not continue that project and focus on it from an economic standpoint. It just offers so much potential,” Veldman said.

For the neighboring Coca-Cola distribution center, the focus was on the safety of the traffic to and from the plant. Between 1,500 and 2,000 Coca-Cola tractor trailers use Highway 14 to travel to and from Owatonna on an annual basis.

“It’s very critical for us,” said Scott Schumacher, distribution center manager at Coca-Cola. “I will tell you with the growth that the Rochester area has seen, we continue to see our business increase over there, which obviously means more traffic that we have along that highway. Obviously, it goes without saying that when you’ve got a four-lane highway versus a two-lane highway, it’s a lot safer.”

Safety concerns were also a focus for local glass manufacturer Viracon, which employs nearly 100 people who take Highway 14 for their daily commute.

“A four-lane highway would significantly make our current employees’ travels safer,” said Troy Hansen, director of materials at Viracon. “By not moving forward with the Highway 14 improvement, it puts our current and future employees safety at risk.”

Hansen said the current two-lane highway is also a constraint on the company’s supply chain.

“The current road places our drivers, trucks, products and supplies in close proximity to passenger vehicles and creates an even greater safety risk,” Hansen said. “Because of this, our drivers and contract carriers prefer to use alternate routes for moving products from east to west, causing additional out of route miles and increasing transportation costs.”

Rebecca Rodenberg can be reached at 444-2376. Follow her on Twitter.com @OPPREbecca.

[Main](#) <sup>[3]</sup> [Business](#) <sup>[4]</sup> [News](#) <sup>[5]</sup>

[Main](#) [Business](#) [News](#)

**Source URL:** <http://owatonna.com/content/businesses-officials-tout-benefits-hwy-14-project>

**Links:**

[1] <mailto:rrodenborg@owatonna.com>

[2] <http://owatonna.com/sites/default/files/3.10-hwy-14-2.jpg>

[3] <http://owatonna.com/category/main-story-box/main>

[4] <http://owatonna.com/category/news/business>

[5] <http://owatonna.com/category/news/news>