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Highway 14 Partnership calls on Gov. Dayton to guarantee 4-lane project

In 20-year plan

March 10, 2012

By Josh Moniz - Staff Writer , The Journal

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NORTH MANKATO The Highway 14 Partnership made a direct appeal to Gov. Mark Dayton to ensure Highway 14's four-lane expansion is part of the Minnesota Department of Transportation's 20-year Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan.

The press conference held in North Mankato was attended by mayors from Partnership cities, area business owners and a victim of Highway 14's dangerous roads. Each speaker shared their own story about why they feel a complete four-lane from Rochester to New Ulm is essential for economic growth and safety.

North Mankato Mayor Mark Dehen led the meeting, emphasizing concern that Highway 14 would be left off of MnDOT's 20-Year-Plan. He explained that the plan hasn't been completed yet, but the Partnership had strong concerns Highway 14 was low priority after speaking with MnDOT officials. He said The Partnership was appealing to Dayton in an effort to guarantee Highway 14 would be part of the plan.

"The interchange and the [New Ulm] bridge projects are nice. But, we have to have the entire [four-lane] project on the plan," said Dehen.

New Ulm Mayor Bob Beussman said New Ulm has one of the highest trucking concentrations in the state, which is highly dependent on the segment of the highway from New Ulm to North Mankato. He said it made a four-lane expansion in that area essential for economic growth.

"I know it's tough (economically). It's tough all over. This project is very important," said Beussman. "I'd like to live to be able to drive on [the completed four-lane road]."

The concerns about Highway 14 were poignantly emphasized during the event when Eric Jacobs, of North Mankato, shared his own accident on the highway. He said that he initially didn't think about the concerns associated with Highway 14 when he began using the segment between New Ulm and North Mankato to commute to work. He said that on Aug. 14, 2010, he was involved in an accident where a vehicle traveling in the opposite direction pulled in front of him while attempting to pass. He said the accident killed the other driver and resulted in him suffer a crush pelvis and left femur. He said the injuries resulted in nerve damage and left him partially paralyzed on his left side.



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New Ulm Mayor Bob Beussman spoke Fr

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"I'm 26 years old and I'm permanently disabled. People like me are getting hurt or passing away on the highway on a regular basis," said Jacobs.

He said has since been unable to work his old job and has focused on raising his 14-month-old daughter. He said he is pursuing a degree in business management to obtain a job that accommodates his condition.

Dehen reiterated at the end of the meeting that the current highway both posed a public safety hazard and held back economic development in the region. He said immediate action is needed to guarantee the problem is dealt with.

A draft of MnDOT's 20-year plan is scheduled to be completed in October and a final plan is to be completed in January 2013.

An expansion of all of Highway 14 to a four-lane highway has been sought for decades by area cities. The remaining segments sought for the expansion are 22 miles between New Ulm and North Mankato and 15 miles between Owatonna and Dodge Center. The current heavy use of the two-lane portions of the highway has resulted in 220 crashes, seven of the fatal, in the last five years.. The four-lane expansion from North Mankato to New Ulm is projected to cost more than \$300 million, and the portion between Owatonna and Dodge Center is projected to cost \$165 million.

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