

Advocates urge Highway 14 completion east of Owatonna

By ASHLEY PETERSON apeterson@owatonna.com | Posted: Monday, April 30, 2012 9:00 pm

OWATONNA — Nobody could blame Owatonna's Highway 14 Partnership representative Les Abraham for his sense of alarm when he thought the local stretch of Highway 14 east to Dodge Center was being overlooked during Friday's Highway 14 meeting with Gov. Mark Dayton.

The concern arose after Abraham, president of the Owatonna City Council, received an email from Partnership lobbyist J.D. Burton stating that Rep. Terry Morrow and Sen. Kathy Sheran had met with Dayton and Commissioner of Transportation Thomas K. Sorel to discuss safety concerns and plans for Highway 14.

"They promoted the four-lane expansion of Highway 14 between North Mankato and New Ulm," Burton wrote in an email to Abraham.

Though the meeting was deemed "productive" by attendees, Dayton made no decisions one way or another on the project. What seemed worse to Abraham, was that the rest of Highway 14 appeared to be forgotten.

"I thank them for meeting with the governor, but it appears that the section between Owatonna and Dodge Center will be overlooked and forgotten," Abraham wrote in a response to Burton and other elected officials. "I wholeheartedly agree that North Mankato to New Ulm is of the utmost importance, but the Owatonna-Dodge Center connection is of major need also."

Abraham's fears were quickly quieted as he found out the main reason behind the meeting was to review Minnesota Department of Transportation's Safety Audit Report.

"After I talked to J.D., he said they are looking at the whole thing. I overreacted," Abraham said. "What they're doing is, No. 1, they do represent that part of Highway 14. They were looking at that, but they haven't forgotten the rest."

The news was good as far as Abraham was concerned, but that's not to say he isn't going to continue to advocate for Highway 14 being a higher priority on MnDOT's 20-year plan.

"Highway 14 has been on the drawing board for 50 years. Now, you take and add another 20 years to it, somebody could be born and have retired within the time frame that this road has been on the drawing boards before we actually get it completed," Abraham said. "Parts of it have been done, but sections that need to be finished to do the job need to be finished."

Abraham is urging MnDOT to keep Highway 14 on the priority list so if federal dollars do start

flowing, they can be allocated to the \$117 million project.

"Projects they're talking about on the list, like bridge interchanges and other things that have taken place, that need to be improved upon are all over the state. And I understand that. They're \$1-\$2 million projects," Abraham said. "But don't forget the big ones. You're putting money all over the state, but you're not helping Highway 14, where you also need to help."