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- Sports
- Legals
- Opinion
- Forums
- Food
- Sections
- Extras
- Ads
- Jobs
- Local Classifieds
- CU
- Customer Service

Local News

/ News / Local News /

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- National News
- International News
- Obituaries
- Opinion
- Lifestyle
- Monday Business
- Agribusiness
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Highway 14 inclusion bill laid over for omnibus bill

New Ulm mayor testifies at House committee hearing

February 21, 2013

By Josh Moniz - Staff Writer , The Journal

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ST. PAUL - A bill mandating that the Minnesota Department of Transportation include the Highway 14 four-lane expansion project in its 20-year State Highway Investment Plan was laid over for inclusion in a later omnibus bill Wednesday during its hearing in the Minnesota House's Transportation Policy Committee.

The bill deals specifically with the long-sought four-lane expansion of Highway 14 from Highway 218 near Owatonna to Dodge Center and from near Nicollet to New Ulm. The bill also requires building interchanges where Highway 14 meets Highway 15, County Highway 42 and Highway 169. The bill stipulates the project cannot be removed from the 20-year plan without special, unforeseen circumstance and without notifying the leaders of related committees.

Advocates for the four-lane expansion project have argued inclusion in the 20-year plan is essential to seeing the project completed, especially because the project would not be allowed access to any windfall of federal funds in Minnesota if it's not in the plan. An exact companion bill is pending in the Senate.

During the testimony portion of the Wednesday hearing, several members of the Highway 14 Partnership spoke on behalf of the project.

Owatonna Mayor Tom Kuntz said 52 fatalities and 41 serious injury crashes have occurred on Highway 14 from Rochester to New Ulm over the last decade. He emphasized that the four-lane expansion is as equally important for economic growth along the highway corridor as it is for improving safety.

"Too many people are losing their lives on Highway 14," said Kuntz, "We don't want to waste the prior investments that have been made towards the expansion, let alone risk the safety of drivers or our region's economic growth."

New Ulm Mayor Bob Beussman emphasized the need to at least include interchange work at Highway 14 intersection with Highway 15 near New Ulm. He said the Highway 15 bridge nearby is scheduled for replacement in 2018, so it would make more sense to do the projects together.

He also emphasized the need for a concrete plan so the project does not continue to go untouched like it has for the last 50 years.

"So far, this necessary safety improvement remains unplanned and unfunded by MnDOT. For the flow of commerce in and out of New Ulm, and the safety of area drivers, we need to make sure this project and the full four-lane expansion is included in the 20-year plan," said Beussman.

Looking forward, a related bill dealing with setting aside the funding of the Highway 14 four-lane project will get a hearing at

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the House Transportation Finance Committee on Wednesday, Feb. 27 at 10 a.m. in Hearing Room 5 in the State Office Building.

After that, Rep. Frank Horstein, who chairs the House Transportation Finance Committee, will be in Mankato on Friday, March 1 from 12 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the Greater Mankato Business Development Center. He will focus on hearing from the local community and business leaders on regional transportation concerns. To register for the event, visit gmg.greatermankato.com/events/eventdetail.aspx?EventID=363

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