

Highway 14 is a priority for Waseca, Mankato and the region

By VICKI JENSEN and KATHY BRYNAERT Guest columnists | Posted: Friday, February 15, 2013 1:00 pm

This past week, together with the bipartisan delegation of legislators representing the communities along U.S. Highway 14, we introduced two pieces of legislation aimed at completing the four-lane expansion of this important interregional corridor.

We're joining forces because completing Highway 14 isn't a Mankato project or an Owatonna project. Highway 14 is a regional priority, and having a consistent four-lane highway is necessary for the safety and economic vitality of every community that it serves, and many important decisions will soon be made that will affect the future of Highway 14.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) is in the process of updating its 20-year State Highway Investment Plan. This document will lay out the state's highway funding priorities, so it's important that Highway 14 be included in this planning document so that progress continues. However, MnDOT's investment strategy is moving away from corridor expansion projects to less-expensive fixes. The longer we wait to finish Highway 14, the more unsafe and congested the road will become, the more expensive the expansion projects will get, and the more economic opportunity our region will lose. That is why our bill, H.F. 211/S.F. 169, directs MnDOT to put the Highway 14 in its 20-year plan.

The other bill, H.F. 210/ S.F. 168, provides funding to complete the four-lane expansion projects from Owatonna to Dodge Center and North Mankato to New Ulm. At the state level, there needs to be a serious conversation about the issues facing Highway 14 (the high number of fatalities and serious injury crashes, the heavy truck traffic, the dangerous intersections, and the delays the current road causes to the flow of commerce) and the resources it will take to address them. As the Legislature considers its transportation budget, it is imperative that we have a thoughtful discussion on what will be needed to finish Highway 14.

We deeply appreciate that Governor Dayton committed to completing the four-lane expansion of Highway 14 between North Mankato and Nicollet in 2017-18. However, we can't let progress stop there. Highway 14 serves many important economic hubs—Rochester, Owatonna, Waseca, Greater Mankato, and New Ulm—a two-lane rural highway cannot meet the demands of our area's growing populations and industries. Now is the time to plan and invest in the future success of our region, and in turn, our state.

While we, along with legislative colleagues, will strongly advocate for Highway 14 at the Capitol, we

can't do this alone. We will stay in communication and let you know of ways you can help make Highway 14 a priority for the state. MnDOT will host another round of stakeholder meetings in the spring to gain public input on the 20-year plan: you should attend these events and speak to the importance of completing Highway 14.

Thank you for all of your efforts, both in the past and those ahead.

State Sen. Vicki Jensen represents Minnesota District 24, which includes Waseca, Owatonna and Faribault. State Rep. Kathy Brynaert represents Minnesota District 19B, which includes Mankato.