

## Highway 14 Expansion a Legislative Priority

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By: Brittany Lewis



(ABC 6 NEWS) -- Highway 14 is one of the most dangerous highways in the state. Now some local lawmakers are working to make the highway safer.

The highway's fatality rate is much higher than the state average.

Just a few months ago, three people, including a ten-year-old were killed in a crash on Highway 14 near Dodge Center. A proposed bill would make Highway 14 from Rochester to New Ulm a four lane highway. Supporters of the bill say the two lane parts of the highway between Owatonna and Dodge Center and Nicollet and New Ulm, are not only dangerous, but hurt the area economically.

"It's critical that we get some momentum going," said Thomas Kuntz.

Kuntz is the Mayor of Owatonna and is also a member of the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership, a group made up of local mayors, city officials, and other public and private parties working to fix Highway 14.

"I remember back in the 70's we were talking about highway 14 and its value and it's economic impact in southern Minnesota. As we fight for dollars throughout the state of Minnesota, it's pretty hard for the upstate to compete with the metropolitan areas," said Kuntz.

Kuntz says Highway 14 was not part of the Minnesota Department of Transportation 20 year plan. That's why local legislators are stepping in. Senator Vicki Jensen proposed a bill that would give \$431.6 million to fund a project making Highway 14 four lanes from Rochester to New Ulm.

"It's important for me to package it as one bill because it really is a regional issue," said Jensen.

The highway is dangerous. From 2002 to 2011, there were 52 fatalities and 41 serious injury crashes between Rochester and New Ulm.

"I don't think there is anybody in Southern Minnesota that doesn't have a connection with someone that's been killed on Highway 14," said Kuntz.

But as Rochester plans to expand, supporters say, Highway 14 should too.

"With Rochester becoming the destination city and trying to get some money of the state capital, we need to have a four lane all the way to Rochester," said Kuntz.

"Now in Rochester the expansion for Mayo and having that be a health care destination, We were already looking at increases of like 30% in our area by 2030, a population expansion like that would increase that, I would imagine. So it's gonna be even more important to get that completed from New Ulm to Rochester," said Jensen.

Jensen said she is also working on a bill to include Highway 14 in Mn/DOT'S 20 year plan.