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Hwy. 14 bonding bills get hearing

March 23, 2013

By Josh Moniz - Staff Writer , The Journal

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ST. PAUL Three bonding bills aimed at advancing portions of the remaining Highway 14 four-lane expansion project got informational hearings Friday in the Minnesota House's Transportation Finance Committee. The bill were presented for a non-binding recommendation that they be advanced.

The two bills authored by new legislator Rep. Clark Johnson (DFL-St. Peter) specifically sought bonding funds for four-lane interchanges at Highway 14 intersections with Highway 15, Highway 111 and County Highway 23 along with a bypass at its intersection at Nicollet, which is the end of the four-lane expansion portion already promised by Gov. Mark Dayton. The bills seeks bonding of \$15 million for the Nicollet bypass, \$36 million for the Highway 15 interchange and \$14 million for the Highway 111 and County Highway 23 interchange.

The third bill, authored by Rep. Patti Fritz (DFL-Faribault), requests \$199 million in bonding for the remaining Highway 14 four-lane expansion project between Owatonna and Dodge Center.

Johnson testified with Republican Rep. Paul Torkelson that the Highway 14 four-lane project had strong bipartisan support and was entirely about safety and growing commerce. Johnson specifically testified that the Highway 14 interchange at its crossing with Highway 15 is especially prudent since the bridge there is already scheduled for reconstruction in 2018 by MnDOT. He said there is no need for the bridge to be closed twice since the projects are in the same location.

Testimony from residents, business owners and mayors along Highway 14 called the highway "an icon of frustration" and



emphasized the strong need to repair the highway. All the testifiers emphasized the severe danger of the highway and many listed people they knew that had died while driving on it.

New Ulm Mayor Bob Beussman argued New Ulm had the highest concentration of trucking in the state, and that a four-lane expansion is essential to growing the town.

Another emphasis in the testimony was on how long the problems of Highway 14 have been around without resolution. One testimony pointed to a 1974 news article suggesting the four-lane project would be resolved in the year 2000.

Rep. Frank Hornstein, the chair of the committee, pointed out that even author Sinclair Lewis complained about Highway 14 during his time in Minnesota. The problems Lewis faced with Minnesota roads, including the specific roads that became Highway 14, were popularized his 1919 book "Free Air." After writing the book, Lewis even spoke with the Mankato Daily Review, a prior form of the Mankato newspaper, about the need to improve the safety and condition of Minnesota roads through legislation.

Hornstein also noted he is highly supportive of doing some work on Highway 14 as part of his "corridors of commerce" emphasis for

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on Highway 14 as part of the "Centennial Commerce" emphasis for projects.

The bill for the Highway 14 four-lane expansion segment between Nicollet and New Ulm has been discussed in the committee this year and put aside for potential inclusion a transportation omnibus bill. The bill seeks to fund that part of the project through appropriations instead of bonding. The discussion on what will be included in the transportation omnibus bill to start in April when legislators return from their Easter break.

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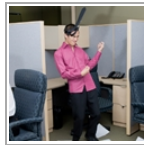
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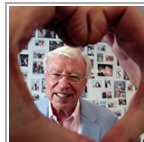
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