

Governor is still not listening to Steele County's concerns about Highway 14

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We should have seen it coming.

Last August, when dignitaries gathered here in Steele County to cut the ribbon and officially open the four-lane stretch of Highway 14 between Owatonna and Waseca, there was one face that was conspicuously absent not only at the ribbon-cutting, but also at the discussion that was held after. The discussion was held between a contingent of local officials, local business leaders and officials from the Minnesota Department of Transportation, and the topic of discussion was the two-lane stretch between Owatonna and Dodge Center — a stretch whose expansion keeps getting pushed off further and further into the future.

And whose face was conspicuously absent? None other than Minnesota Gov. Mark Dayton. People in Gov. Dayton's office said the governor couldn't be there that day because he was under the weather. And we'll accept that. However, we said then and we repeat now, we could not help but think that if Highway 14 were higher up on the governor's priority list that he somehow would have found a way to be here to hear the concerns of local leaders, sniffles or not.

Apparently, Highway 14 still isn't high on the governor's priority list. At least that's the only conclusion we can draw when the governor announced earlier this week that he would not support an increase in the gas tax this year. Though the idea of raising taxes doesn't thrill us, we at least recognize that if something as expensive as expanding Highway 14 is going to be done, there has to be a source of revenue. Just the section between here and Dodge Center carries a price tag of about \$219 million. As our own state legislators acknowledge, maybe a gas tax is the only way to raise that kind of money to accomplish the project.

Again, it's not necessarily that we're thrilled with a gas tax. What is more troublesome is the way in which the governor continues to snub Highway 14 in his plans. As we say, we should have seen it coming last August when he did not show up to cut that ribbon or to hear about the need to expand this highway. Apparently, he's still not listening.