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Case for Hwy. 14 expansion

Walz, NU mayor plead for four-lanes from Kato to New Ulm

September 17, 2013

By Fritz Busch - Staff Writer , The Journal

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NEW ULM - First District Congressman Tim Walz, New Ulm Mayor Bob Beussman, and Rep. Clark Johnson, DFL-North Mankato, talked about the need to include Highway 14 in the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) 20-year plan on Monday at Kohls-Weelborg Chevrolet.

MnDOT plans to let bids for a four-lane Highway 14 project from North Mankato to the east end of Nicollet in 2017 or 2018. Construction will begin shortly thereafter and take about two years with an estimated cost of \$20-22 million.

If a Nicollet bypass is included, costs climb to \$31-33 million. A four-lane project from North Mankato to New Ulm, which has been sought for more than a half century, was estimated to cost \$200 million.

Article Photos



Staff photo by Fritz Busch

In late July, MnDOT did not indicate that the New Ulm-to-Nicollet and Dodge Center-to-Owatonna four-lane projects in its 20-year plan. The Highway Department is expected to finalize its plan in the coming days.

Politicians, business and community leaders including New Ulm and North Mankato Highway 14 Partnership members attended the press conference with Walz in New Ulm. Similar events were held earlier in the day in Owatonna and Rochester.

"We can't have a third-rate route with world class medical facilities (nearly in Rochester)," said Walz, a four-term Democrat. "We understand we can't be first on the list. We're simply asking to be on the list. ... Rochester plans to add 41,000 jobs within the next decade."

Beussman said New Ulm is the state's largest city without a four-lane highway.

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"There have been 16 deaths in 10 years on Highway 14 between New Ulm and North Mankato," Beussman said. "MnDOT ignores its own safety audit. The Minnesota River Bridge [a Highway 14/15 project in New Ulm set to be done in the next few years] and the four-lane project here should be done together. An interchange at the intersection of Highways 111 and 99 in Nicollet should be done at the same time too."

New Ulm Chamber of Commerce President Audra Shaneman said 20 percent of New Ulm's employment is involved in manufacturing. She said 1,000 trucks are dispatched from New Ulm daily.

"The four-lane project to New Ulm is vital for local and area growth and success," Shaneman said. "This highway improvement investment is seriously overdue."

Walz called the four-lane project east of New Ulm "a top priority for job growth and economic development."

"It's time to let Southern Minnesota do what it does best. Create vibrant cities. It's the right thing to do," Walz said. "It's about an investment in labor, materials and lives that we need. Doing the project a little bit at a time is not the way to go."

Johnson said the 2013 Legislature supported the Corridors of Commerce program that included Highway 14 lane expansion.

"We need to move on this now," Johnson said.

Walz urged constituents to support the project by contacting their political representatives, the governor and to "stay close" with his office.

"Hopefully in the next week or two, the whole project will be approved," Walz said.

MnDOT states in information about the Highway 14 New Ulm to North Mankato that the road is a critical transportation corridor connecting points in southern and western Minnesota to Rochester. The highway connects two secondary regional trade centers - Mankato/North Mankato and New Ulm. Current and future mobility, safety and access issues are addressed in the interregional corridor management plan. The scoping process for this corridor indicated that the future design for Highway 14 should be four lanes, according to MnDOT.

For more information, visit www.dot.state.mn/us/d7/projects/14newulmtonmankato/background.html

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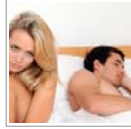
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