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Update: Highway to get up to \$45 million for upgrades

New program will help fund Nicollet, Owatonna upgrades

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---- — ST. PAUL — The Highway 14 four-lane upgrade between North Mankato and Nicollet will start in 2015 instead of two years later, thanks to funding from the Corridors of Commerce program, Gov. Mark Dayton announced Thursday.

The program will also fund a four-lane bypass of Nicollet, slated to cost \$15 million to \$25 million and also begin in 2015.

Ten projects were awarded about \$300 million in funding under the program, approved by the Legislature earlier this year. The program is funded with money borrowed using existing revenue, not new money.

A third Highway 14 project — a \$16 million to \$20 million four-lane upgrade from Owatonna to Dodge Center — was also funded.

Local legislators praised the progress on Highway 14.

Rep. Clark Johnson, a North Mankato Democrat who sponsored a bill to fund the Nicollet bypass, said he was pleased that the intersection with Highway 111 will be safer.

“It’s a white-knuckler every time,” he said of the left turn from Highway 111 onto Highway 14.

Johnson said it’s not clear what the intersection will look like, though he supports a full interchange.

Though legislators didn’t earmark funding for Highway 14 in the Corridors of Commerce program, they wrote criteria that are favorable to that highway and others like it.

Sen. Kathy Sheran, DFL-Mankato, said area lawmakers allocated \$300 million to the program but still worried that Highway 14 would miss out. The Legislature authorized the program but the Minnesota Department of Transportation would actually pick winners and losers.

But Sheran said the list of funded projects shows that MnDOT understood the Legislature’s intent.

She said this funding, though good news, doesn’t come close to closing the gap between the state’s transportation system as it is and as it should be. More than 100 projects applied for this funding, though only 10 were chosen.

“There will be a continued effort to find a more sustainable funding stream,” she said.

Amanda Duerr, lobbyist for the Highway 14 Partnership, credited the advocacy of the region.

“The entire corridor came together and worked so hard from Rochester to New Ulm,” she said.

In June 2012, Dayton announced a four-lane improvement between North Mankato and Nicollet, though at that time he said it would begin in 2017 or 2018.