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Beussman ready for challenges as president of Highway 14 Partnership

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By Clay Schuldt - Staff Writer , The Journal

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NEW ULM "Highway 14 in 2014" is the new rally cry in New Ulm.

Mayor Robert Beussman was recently elected president of the Highway 14 Partnership, replacing Owatonna member Les Abraham. The Highway 14 Partnership was formed in 1998 and includes private and government organizations in southern Minnesota. Its main goal is to safely expand Highway 14 into a four-lane road from Rochester to New Ulm as soon as possible.

U.S. Highway 14 is often cited as one of Minnesota's most dangerous roadways, with a high number of accidents and problem intersections. Beussman specifically cited the Hwy 14/15 interchange as a major concern with numerous fatalities and countless close calls. Truck traffic is another concern. Beussman said that based on his experience the roadway coming into New Ulm from North Mankato is two lanes, but often it has the same amount of traffic as the four-lane roads near Owatonna.

At this point the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) plans to expand the four-lane as far as Nicollet. Extending the lanes to New Ulm is not currently in the 20-year plan. The funding to expand the four-lane from North Mankato to Nicollet came from the Corridors of Commerce program.

The Corridors of Commerce Program was created in 2013 by the Minnesota Legislature through the sale of \$300 million in new bonds to help with construction and reconstruction of highways. On the state level, the goal is to increase the movement of freight to benefit local commerce, but the program could also improve safety. Additional funds from the program are being used to plan create a safer interchange between highways 14 and 111 near Nicollet.

"Gov. Dayton would love to see Highway 14 become a four-lane because you increase transport between Wisconsin and South Dakota," said Beussman citing the economic benefits. The hope is that a four-lane highway could increase truck traffic, allowing new industries to flourish, which then generates more taxes for Minnesota.

"It's a valuable stretch of land, and not just for us, but the whole State," Beussman said.

The obstacle to finishing the project is funding. Beussman said Minnesota is behind on highway funding, and the state already has difficulty repairing roadways. However the success with Corridors of Commerce gives the Highway14 Partnership high hopes.

"I am more optimistic about the project being completed than I was before becoming mayor," said Beussman, who has been an active member of the Highway 14 Partnership since his election in 2010. He continues to be a strong proponents for expanding the road sooner rather than later.

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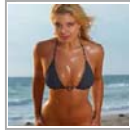
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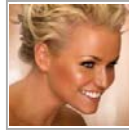
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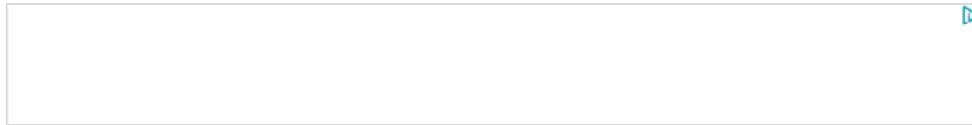


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