

MnDOT announces design change for intersection at Highway 14, Steele County Road 43

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OWATONNA — A week after the Minnesota Department of Transportation held an open house regarding the proposed design of the Highway 14 expansion project east of Owatonna, including an intersection that received criticism from the local agriculture community, Steele Countians have been heard.

On Tuesday, MnDOT announced modifications to the proposed design of the intersection at Steele County Road 43 and Highway 14, which is planned as part of the four-lane expansion of Highway 14 from Highway 218 to 54th Avenue in Owatonna.

“It’s gratifying that the public comments are heard,” said Steele County Commissioner Bruce Kubicek, who represents rural districts. “Some people don’t think bureaucrats listen well, and this is an example that you folks do listen and that is really appreciated. I know all my constituents in that area are going to be much happier with this intersection.”

Originally, a reduced-conflict intersection — which required motorists approaching the divided highway from Country Road 43 to make a right turn onto the highway, and then make a U-turn at a designated median opening — had been recommended for the intersection, but an open at-grade intersection with turn-lane improvements and acceleration lanes will be used instead.

An open at-grade intersection is similar to what is currently seen at the Steele County Road 43 and Highway 14 intersection, except it will be a four-lane highway instead of a two-lane after the expansion. This intersection will allow direct north and south travel for County Road 43 traffic across Highway 14.

“We knew the ag community had its concerns, so we looked at how can we make it work well and flow well without inconveniencing anyone but also making sure it was safe,” said Mike Dougherty, a spokesperson for MnDOT District 6. “We were able to modify the design to reflect the concerns from the public.”

Heather Lukes, MnDOT District 6 project manager, said public input from community members and public officials played a big role in the design modifications.

“We value public opinion,” she said. “After the recent public meetings, MnDOT sat down and looked at all the feedback we’d received and evaluated those. It was decided that the segment one design is going to be modified pertaining to County Road 43.”

Owatonna Mayor Tom Kuntz thanked MnDOT officials for listening to the public.

The original intersection design was chosen for its safety, but Lukes said it will still be safe.

“Safety is very important to us, and the modifications address the safety concerns for all motorists and the needs of the agriculture community,” she said.

Lukes said the intersection has the opportunity to be converted into a reduced-conflict intersection if a safety need arises and can still be turned into an interchange in the future.

Final plans are due to the MnDOT Central Office for the \$16.5 million project, which is funded through the state Corridors of Commerce program, and construction is scheduled for July 2014 and expected to be completed in fall 2015.

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