

The Free Press, Mankato, MN

May 28, 2014

Klobuchar, Zelle call for new federal transportation bill

Officials praise advance in Highway 14 expansion

By Josh Moniz

jmoniz@mankatofreepress.com

---- — NICOLLET — Minnesota Department of Transportation Commissioner Charles Zelle and U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar on Wednesday called for the passage of a new federal transportation bill as they visited Nicollet.

They said a new bill would help bring new funding for Minnesota transportation projects.

They also credited the state's Corridors of Commerce program with securing funding for the four-lane expansion of Highway 14 from North Mankato to Nicollet.

The federal Highway Trust Funds are projected to run out this summer as gas tax revenues are not keeping pace with spending. The problem mirrors issues facing Minnesota's transportation funding.

Klobuchar said she expects Congress to pass a temporary extension until after the election season. She said she prefers to see the passage of a new federal transportation bill, but an extension may benefit Minnesota.

She said she is optimistic Congress could tackle a new transportation bill in the last months of this year. She said she will push for a large expansion in overall transportation funding to help increase the amount that goes to Minnesota.

She said the end of federal earmarks, which she opposed, makes it challenging to get federal funding to specific projects such as Highway 14. She said expanded overall funding is the best route.

Klobuchar and Zelle praised the creation of the state Corridors of Commerce program and its assistance in the Highway 14 four-lane expansion.

Zelle said it is possible the small amount of additional Corridors of Commerce funding passed this year could go toward purchasing Highway 14 right-of-ways. However, he said the decision on spending the funding had not yet been determined.

Zelle said he was pleased that MnDOT was able to agree to the new Highway 14 interchange design preferred by Nicollet residents. He said the switch to a overpass design was "doing it the right way."

He also said the delineators along Highway 14 from Nicollet to New Ulm have helped reduced crashes, but they need to be replaced in the near future with a four-lane expansion.

He joked that Gov. Mark Dayton once told him the delineators were the perfect example of "why people hate MnDOT."

He said he strongly believes further state transportation funding will be passed during next year's legislative session. He said he is hoping they will be able to finally settle on a new dedicated source of state transportation funding.

Klobuchar and Zelle's stop in Nicollet was part of a larger tour of major southern Minnesota cities along Highway 14 to gather local input.