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## Chambers: Corridors of Commerce funds needed for Highway 14

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By Clay Schuldt - Staff Writer , The Journal

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NEW ULM - Quick and efficient transportation is an essential component of economic development in Minnesota communities.

In 2014, the State Legislature provided \$31.5 million for the Corridors of Commerce program. This funding could be used for right of way acquisition or engineering. A group of area chambers of commerce want these funds to be used to acquire right of way along two-lane segments of Highway 14 in preparation for four lanes.

Highway 14 is an important roadway, stretching from the Wisconsin border to the South Dakota border. Despite the importance of Highway 14, travel remains inconsistent because several key sections are limited to two lanes.

Chambers in New Ulm, Nicollet, Rochester, Waseca and Owatonna joined by the Greater Mankato Growth, recently sent a letter to Minnesota Department of Transportation Commissioner Charlie Zelle. They urged Zelle to use Corridors of Commerce funds to acquire right of way along the unfinished two-lane sections of Highway 14.

"The initial Corridors of Commerce program funding will result in significant progress being made on Highway 14," said Audra Shaneman, president/CEO of the New Ulm Area Chamber of Commerce. "However, even with those projects moving forward, more needs to be done to provide four lanes from Rochester to New Ulm. This new funding is an opportunity to get the remaining segments ready to go."

Patrick Baker, director of Government and Institutional Affairs for Greater Mankato Growth, said area businesses understand that economic success is tied to infrastructure.

"Investing in Highway 14 right of way would not only accelerate the remaining projects once full funding is secured, but also demonstrate to citizens and businesses that completing Highway 14 is a priority of the state," Baker said.

MnDOT estimates that the second and third phase of the Owatonna to Dodge Center expansion would cost between \$25 million and \$28 million in right of ways, while \$16-19 million for right of ways is needed to expand Highway 14 into a four-lane from Nicollet to the New Ulm Highway 14/15 interchange.

MnDOT is expected to announce 2014 Corridors of Commerce funding this summer.

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