

## Highway 14 funding progresses

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Another \$8 million toward the Highway 14 expansion project may seem small compared to the \$100 million plus scope of the complete upgrade, but it represents more progress on building the highway that will be key to economic development across southern Minnesota.

Gov. Mark Dayton announced Tuesday that Highway 14 was allocated a total of \$8 million in the most recent award from the Corridors of Commerce program. The Highway 14 interchange with State Highway 15 at New Ulm will get \$700,000 in design money. Another \$7.3 million will be used to acquire right-of-way on the four-lane expansion from Owatonna to Dodge Center.

Both projects represent progress to eventually making Highway 14 a four-lane from Rochester to New Ulm, the long stated goal of the Highway 14 Partnership.

The stretch of road from Owatonna to Dodge Center is one of the last pieces of expansion needed to make the Highway a four-lane from Nicollet to Rochester. That piece of the highway is in bad need of not only expansion but repair. Once completed, that section will improve travel times for key commercial businesses between Rochester and Mankato.

The Corridors of Commerce program was established as an innovative way to get critical road funding to projects that had specific economic development benefits. The program uses highway bonds instead of direct allocations from the gas tax or the general fund.

In a previous round of funding, Highway 14 received \$35 million to \$50 million for the expansion of the highway from North Mankato to Nicollet and a Nicollet bypass. A stretch between Nicollet and New Ulm will cost 10s of millions more.

About half of the funding in the latest round — \$45 million — went to a four-lane expansion of Highway 371 between Nisswa and Jenkins, another key area for Minnesota tourism and commerce. Dayton and the Legislature approved a total of \$331 million into the Corridors of Commerce program in 2013 and 2014.

So far, the money appears to be well spent. It is going to projects that will have a specific return on investment for taxpayers. That's road funding that works.