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Survey shows support for raising gas tax to pay for Highway 14, other statewide transportation needs

Partnership calls on voters to press legislative candidates to commit to funding long-term, comprehensive transportation package

MANKATO—Residents and business leaders along the U.S. Highway 14 corridor between Rochester and New Ulm support increasing the gas tax to pay for the state’s transportation needs, according to a [new survey conducted by the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership](#).

“With only five weeks left before the election, it’s time for voters to speak up about the need to fix Highway 14 and demand that our candidates listen,” said New Ulm Mayor and Partnership President Robert Beussman at a press conference this morning. “This survey shows that there is strong support for raising the gas tax and allowing the metro to fund its own light rail if it means we will get Highway 14 done. We deserve elected officials who are willing to break the stalemate over these issues.”

Nearly 700 residents from Brown, Blue Earth, Nicollet, Waseca, Steele, Dodge and Olmsted counties participated in the Partnership’s survey, which was sent to its followers via e-mail, Facebook and Twitter between Aug. 24 and Sept. 8. On questions regarding raising new revenues to help meet the state’s \$600 million-a-year need for highway and street funding, 64.3 percent of respondents said they support an increase in the gas tax dedicated to highways and roads and a plurality of respondents support an increase in tab fees.

In addition, 76 percent of respondents support allowing the metro area to move forward with light rail construction if it is paid for solely with metro-area funding such as a local sales tax. Further, the survey found little interest in diverting the state’s general fund dollars from other areas such as education or health and human services in order to pay for transportation, with 62.4 percent of respondents voting “no” on that question.

Patrick Baker, director of government and institutional affairs for Greater Mankato Growth and a member of the Highway 14 Partnership Board of Directors, noted that the survey results echo the results of a scientific poll authorized by the Minnesota Transportation Alliance. In that poll, 61 percent of the voters polled in the counties between New Ulm and Rochester would be in favor of a gas tax increase if the revenue it generated is specifically directed to fund the completion of repairs and widening along Highway 14.

“We know that people along Highway 14 care about safety and economic growth,” Baker said. “This survey shows that they also want the state to raise new revenue to pay for transportation costs. They would prefer to pay more to make sure our highways and roads get the repairs they need rather than take money away from other state programs and areas.”

North Mankato Mayor Mark Dehen said that he and other Highway 14 Partnership board members and advocates have been busy meeting with legislative candidates to urge them to make the completion of Highway 14 a top priority.

“We desperately need a comprehensive, long-term transportation package that funds the remaining expansion of Highway 14,” Dehen said. “Our survey finds support for the two main issues that have been barriers to a compromise — raising the gas tax and allowing the metro area to pay for its own light rail transit. Our state legislators need to stop bickering over these issues and come to a real solution.”

Dehen encouraged residents and owners of businesses along or near Highway 14 to talk to candidates and emphasize that the highway expansion project is important to them.

“Candidates need to hear from the voters,” Dehen said. “We are calling on everyone along Highway 14 to talk to the candidates before the election and let them know that we are counting on them to pass a comprehensive transportation bill so that we can finally fix Highway 14.”

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For more information about the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership, visit our website at ushighway14.com.