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## **Hoping for progress on expansion goals, Highway 14 advocates submit requests for Corridors of Commerce funds**

ST. PAUL, MINN.—With an eye toward continuing the expansion of U.S. Highway 14 to four lanes from New Ulm to Rochester, the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership officially submitted requests for funds from the state Corridors of Commerce program ahead of yesterday’s deadline for project submissions.

“From the standpoint of economic development and safety, there is an extremely strong case for why Highway 14 deserves a share of the available Corridors of Commerce funds,” said Karen Foreman, president of the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership and a member of the Mankato City Council. “We are hopeful that MnDOT will agree and we can make progress on the final stretches that have yet to be expanded to four lanes.”

The Partnership has its sights set on completing the two remaining portions of the decades-long expansion project – 12 miles from Nicollet to New Ulm and 12.5 miles from Owatonna to Dodge Center. However, with an estimated \$300 million price tag to finish both sections — and only \$400 million in Corridors of Commerce funding available for projects statewide — there is simply not enough state money available to complete the project.

“The Legislature showed a commitment to improving our state’s highway system by putting \$400 million into Corridors of Commerce, but with dozens of projects and millions of dollars in need statewide, those funds will be gobbled up quickly,” Foreman said. “We want to make sure that Highway 14 gets a piece of the pie.”

One positive development for projects like Highway 14 is MnDOT’s decision to maintain the 50/50 split for doling out Corridors of Commerce funds between Greater Minnesota and the Twin Cities metro area. Partnership members and other Greater Minnesota transportation advocates were extremely vocal in raising concerns late last year when some metro-area interests tried to get a larger pool of money for their projects. In revising its project selection criteria, MnDOT opted to leave the 50/50 split intact, at least for the upcoming funding cycle.

“We are grateful that MnDOT listened to our concerns and will continue to divide funds equally between Greater Minnesota and the metro,” Foreman said.

On the other hand, one aspect of the new Corridors of Commerce scoring criteria that could go against Highway 14 is a provision that allows MnDOT to award more points to interregional corridors that connect Greater Minnesota trade centers to the metro area over those that connect Greater Minnesota cities to one another.

The public project submission process which closed Monday is the first step toward determining which projects will receive Corridors of Commerce funding. MnDOT will now spend the next two months evaluating projects, with plans to announce the final awards in April.

In the meantime, the Partnership is encouraging local governments in the region to pass resolutions of support for the Highway 14 expansion and for area chambers of commerce to submit letters of support as well. The public is encouraged to get involved, too.

“Residents can help in our efforts by contacting their legislators and urging them to support more funding for Corridors of Commerce,” Foreman said. “It will take a region-wide effort with help from legislators, business owners, city leaders and the public to finally complete Highway 14.”

*The U.S. Highway 14 Partnership is an advocacy organization supporting the four-lane expansion of Highway 14. Formed in 1998, the Highway 14 Partnership includes local governments, private businesses and other organizations across southern Minnesota. Online at [ushighway14.com](http://ushighway14.com).*

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