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February 8, 2013

The Honorable Mark Dayton  
Governor of Minnesota  
130 State Capitol  
75 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Commissioner Charlie Zelle  
Minnesota Department of Transportation  
395 John Ireland Boulevard, Mailstop 100  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Governor Dayton and Commissioner Zelle:

On behalf of Greater Mankato Growth (GMG), the chamber of commerce and economic development organization serving the Greater Mankato area, we write to request that you include the four lane expansion of U.S. Highway 14 from Owatonna to Dodge Center and North Mankato to New Ulm in the 20 year State Highway Investment Plan currently under review. These projects are vital to improve the safety and economic opportunity of this important corridor.

As you are aware, the 20-year plan establishes the investment priorities for state and federal funding resources. The exclusion of Highway 14 from this plan would be a serious blow to our region, as countless businesses and individuals rely on Highway 14 for the movement of goods, as well as themselves and their families.

GMG appreciates Governor Dayton's commitment to completing the four lane expansion of Highway 14 between North Mankato and Nicollet. This is an important step in providing a consistent four lane corridor between Rochester and New Ulm. We respectfully request that you continue to work to ensure that progress continues on the entire Highway 14 corridor.

As you are painfully aware, far too many people are losing their lives on Highway 14. From 2002 to 2011, there were 52 fatalities on this corridor between Rochester and New Ulm. The preliminary tally for 2012 shows another eight fatalities, including a 10 year old boy on his way home from receiving cancer treatment at the Mayo Clinic. With projections showing that the region's traffic volumes and population will grow significantly in the next twenty years, safety concerns on Highway 14 are only going to increase as these two-lane stretches become even more dangerous.

Further, Highway 14 is a corridor upon which the Greater Mankato area and all of southern Minnesota rely on for our economic vitality. As you may be aware, Walmart has identified Mankato as the location of its next Midwest distribution facility with construction set to begin in the near-term. This project will greatly increase the importance of Highway 14 as a critical economic corridor. However, numerous Greater Mankato based businesses that currently use Highway 14 for moving their goods and employees are becoming increasingly concerned about delays and dangerous intersections that the two unfinished segments cause. As our region continues to grow, it will be critically important to ensure that future economic opportunities are not hampered by inadequate infrastructure. Indeed, projections show the North Mankato to New Ulm segment will grow 60-80% by 2025 and the Owatonna to Dodge Center segment will grow by over 50% by 2034.

Finally, as an organization that supports the efficient use of government resources, GMG is concerned that without action, the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Owatonna to Dodge Center project will need re-evaluation. These documents have a three year shelf life and the Final EIS for this project was approved in August 2010, so it is imperative that progress be made to prevent additional taxpayer expense and delay in completing the Highway 14 corridor.


Now is the time when important decisions are being made about the future of transportation in Minnesota – Highway 14 must be part of that discussion. GMG respectfully requests that MnDOT prioritize the completion of this important interregional corridor in its 20 year plan.

Thank you for your leadership and support.

Sincerely,



Jonathan G. Zierdt  
President & CEO



Gregory R. Kutcher, M.D.  
Chairman of the Board

President & CEO  
Mayo Clinic Health System  
Southwest Minnesota Region

cc:

Highway 14 Legislative Delegation  
Sen. Scott Dibble, Chair, Senate Transportation and Public Safety Committee  
Rep. Frank Hornstein, Chair, House Transportation and Finance Committee  
Rep. Ron Erhardt, Chair, House Transportation Policy Committee  
Sen. Tom Bakk, Senate Majority Leader  
Rep. Paul Thissen, Speaker of the House  
Sen. David Hann, Senate Minority Leader  
Rep. Kurt Daudt, House Minority Leader  
Greg Paulson, Assistant District Engineer, MnDOT District 6  
Greg Ous, District Engineer, MnDOT District 7