



1961 Premier Drive | Suite 100 | Mankato, MN 56001
PH 507.385.6640 | PH 800.697.0652 | FX 507.345.4451
greatermankato.com

October 15, 2013

Commissioner Charlie Zelle
Minnesota Department of Transportation
395 John Ireland Blvd., Mail Stop 100
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Commissioner Zelle:

On behalf of Greater Mankato Growth, the chamber of commerce and economic development organization serving the Greater Mankato area, I write to recommend the Highway 14 projects needed to complete a consistent four-lane corridor from Rochester to New Ulm for Corridors of Commerce program funding. Completing this long overdue project will ease critical bottlenecks and support economic growth by providing the infrastructure necessary to connect the regional trade centers of Rochester, Owatonna, Greater Mankato and New Ulm.

The U.S. Highway 14 Partnership in their letter to you on September 23, 2013 detailed the outstanding projects along the Highway 14 corridor and provided justification for their funding under this program. Greater Mankato Growth fully supports the Partnership's letter and proposed project list.

As you are aware, Highway 14 is a vital economic lifeline for our region that countless businesses and individuals rely on for the movement of goods, as well as themselves and their families. Highway 14 is a true "Corridor of Commerce." However, challenges with congestion and safety along Highway 14 continue to mount. MnDOT audits have consistently shown that commercial traffic rates as well as crash rates across the Highway 14 corridor are significantly higher than the state average. Further, continued growth in the region is placing immense pressure on Highway 14.

The Greater Mankato area is a significant contributor to this growth. The Mankato-North Mankato Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) leads all MSAs in the state in the growth of its gross domestic product, leads all outstate MSAs in population growth since 2010 and leads all state MSAs in employment growth in goods production. Further, a number of significant projects currently under or near construction means the region is poised for more growth. For example, Walmart has identified Mankato as the site of its next Midwest distribution facility with construction scheduled to begin within a year. The need for this community to efficiently and safely move goods and individuals out of, and into, this market and across our entire region has never been more important.

As the Southern Minnesota region continues to grow and become an even bigger contributor to the state's economy, we expect our public partners to do their share by making the necessary investments in infrastructure. Businesses, local governments, and citizens from all along the Highway 14 corridor are united in our support for investment in this critical project. Greater Mankato Growth respectfully requests MnDOT's support to complete the outstanding Highway 14 projects that are needed to provide a safe and efficient transportation infrastructure that supports this region's businesses and commuters. The longer this expansion is put off, the more lives that will be lost, the more expensive these projects will become and the more regional economic growth that will be forgone.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration on this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Zierdt', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jonathan G. Zierdt
President & CEO

Enclosure: U.S. Highway 14 Partnership Letter



September 23, 2013

Commissioner Charlie Zelle
Minnesota Department of Transportation
395 John Ireland Blvd., Mail Stop 100
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Commissioner Zelle:

On behalf of the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership, I would like to formally recommend the Highway 14 projects needed to complete a consistent four-lane corridor from Rochester to New Ulm for Corridors of Commerce program funding.

During the 2013 Legislative Session, the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership exerted a significant legislative advocacy, grassroots outreach, and media effort to support the passage and funding of the Corridors of Commerce program, believing that this program's intent is to provide a funding mechanism to complete Minnesota's long-overdue highway corridor expansion projects, like Highway 14. We are very pleased to now have the opportunity to nominate the Highway 14 projects that are needed to provide a safe and efficient transportation infrastructure to support our region's businesses and commuters, which are enumerated below:

Owatonna to Dodge Center four-lane expansion: This 16-mile, two-lane segment of Highway 14 creates a bottleneck between the four-lane freeways to its east and west. With 15% commercial traffic, which is 1.7 times above normal for a rural two-lane highway, paired with heavy use by agricultural vehicles and commuters between the regional trade centers of Rochester and Owatonna, this segment causes significant delay and safety concerns to users. Over the past decade, there have been 11 fatalities on this two-lane segment. Currently, 18,000 commuters use Highway 14 to work in Rochester each day. With the \$6 billion planned development of downtown Rochester to support the Destination Medical Center that is projected to create 35-45,000 jobs and the populations of Rochester and Owatonna expected to grow 22% and 16% respectively over the next ten years, this highway will soon be rendered even more deficient to meet the commercial demands the region. This project fits the Corridors of Commerce criteria for Interregional Corridor Capacity Improvement projects.

Nicollet Bypass: Governor Dayton committed to completing the four-lane expansion of Highway 14 from North Mankato to Nicollet, with construction to begin in 2017. Due to funding constraints, this expansion is currently planned to terminate east of Nicollet. The current alignment of Highway 14 runs through the City of Nicollet, but the Final EIS for the Highway 14 expansion project includes constructing a bypass around the City. Ending the four-lane expansion east of Nicollet will create additional vehicular and pedestrian safety concern, as incoming traffic will have to quickly transition to reduced speeds and reduced lanes as they enter the downtown business area. Bypassing the City of Nicollet would provide a smoother transition and safer commercial area. This project would qualify for the Interregional Corridor Capacity Improvement funding, with a four-lane expressway adjacent to the bypass.

Nicollet TH 111/Highway 14 Interchange: The 2012 MnDOT Safety Audit of Highway 14 between North Mankato and Nicollet identified the intersection of Highway 14 and TH 111 as having “significantly greater than expected” crash rates. The City of Nicollet has expressed its concerns to MnDOT over an at-grade crossing of TH 111 with an expanded Highway 14 due to this intersection’s heavy use by commercial and agricultural vehicles. Minus the Nicollet bypass, Highway 14 vehicles will now likely be traveling through this geometrically skewed intersection at increased speeds, which would increase accident severity. Should the Nicollet bypass be constructed, these large, slowing moving agricultural vehicles will now have additional lanes and higher speeds of oncoming traffic to contend with while attempting to cross Highway 14, which will increase the already frequent backups at this intersection. An interchange with TH 111 and the Highway 14 Nicollet bypass is simply the only way to safely address the traffic use at this intersection. This project would qualify for the State Freight Bottlenecks funding under the Corridors of Commerce Program.

Nicollet to New Ulm four-lane expansion: The expansion of Highway 14 from Nicollet to New Ulm is needed to complete the consistent, four-lane corridor from Rochester to New Ulm. The City of New Ulm is currently the largest Minnesota city that is not served by a four-lane highway. Site selectors have repeatedly told the City that while the workforce and economic environment of New Ulm are impressive, the lack of a four lane highway makes New Ulm uncompetitive in attracting new economic development. With Highway 14 serving as New Ulm’s connection to I-90 and I-35, businesses deal with bottlenecks getting in and out of town, prolonged back-ups, and an inability to pass along the corridor due to the inadequate capacity of the two lane segment. Commercial vehicle traffic between New Ulm and North Mankato is 12.6%, over 1.5 times the average for rural two-lane highways. This project, which is needed to connect the regional trade centers of Mankato and New Ulm, fits the criteria for Interregional Corridor Capacity Improvements.

New Ulm TH 15/Highway 14 Interchange: The New Ulm TH14 Minnesota River Bridge is scheduled to be replaced in 2018 under Chapter 152 funding. The 2012 MnDOT Safety Audit identified the intersection of Highway 14 and TH 15 as having “significantly greater than expected crash rates” and the “most complex geometry of any intersection on the corridor.” The

Safety Audit recommended that improvements to the TH 14/15 interchange be completed at the time of the bridge reconstruction, yet such action is not yet planned or programmed. With an estimated 1,000 commercial vehicles being dispatched out of New Ulm daily, this intersection causes a bottleneck in addition to safety concerns. Manufacturers such as Schell's, Kraft Foods, 3M, and AMPI all rely on Highway 14 to ship their freight out to the rest of the state and nation. Capacity and safety improvements to this intersection are needed to support the economy of New Ulm. This project would qualify for the State Freight Bottlenecks funding category.

As I'm sure you are well aware, there is overwhelming regional support for the completion of Highway 14. Local government officials, chambers of commerce, businesses, state legislators, and Congressman Walz all recognize that Highway 14 is Southern Minnesota's true "Corridor of Commerce." Together, we are working to provide the infrastructure that is needed to connect the regional trade centers of Rochester, Owatonna, Mankato, and New Ulm and support our region's robust economy and growing population. The public unity, passion, and proactive advocacy behind improving Highway 14 is unlike any other effort in the state.

Thank you very much for your support for the creation of the Corridors of Commerce program and for taking the time to review the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership's project recommendations. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact our lobbyist Amanda Duerr at acduerr@flaherty-hood.com or (651) 259-1928. The U.S. Highway 14 Partnership looks forward to continuing to work with the Department in completing a four-lane Highway 14 from New Ulm to Rochester.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Les Abraham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Les Abraham
President, U.S. Highway 14 Partnership