



Transportation District 7

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TO: Project Advisory Committee (PAC) Members

RE: **Update**--U.S. Highway 14, New Ulm to North Mankato Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

Dear PAC Members:

Mn/DOT recently completed the U.S. Highway 14, New Ulm to North Mankato, Amended Scoping Decision Document (SDD). As you may recall, it is necessary to amend the original SDD because the alignment alternatives through the Cities of Courtland and Nicollet were eliminated, and the Minnesota River crossing into New Ulm was added to the project limits. Notice of the Amended SDD will be published on October 24th in the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board's *EQB Monitor*. A copy of the Amended SDD is included in this mailing for your reference. The document is also available on the project website at:

<http://www.dot.state.mn.us/d7/projects/14newulmtonmankato/documents.html> .

The development of the U.S. Highway 14 EIS will gain momentum this fall and winter as the in-depth investigation of cultural resources (historic architectural or archaeological sites) wraps up. This investigation has required more effort and time than originally anticipated. Including this information on cultural resources in the EIS is critical to decision making on this project because a federal law known as Section 4(f) prohibits use of federal money on projects that acquire land from properties eligible for the National Register of Historic places unless there is no alternative available and the project includes all possible planning to minimize harm to the protected resource. Obviously, this could have a big impact on the alignment that is selected.

The following is an anticipated schedule for some of the key remaining steps to develop the EIS:

Publishing of Amended Scoping Decision Document	October 2005
Project Advisory Committee (PAC) Meeting	January 2006
Draft EIS	March 2006
Public Hearing	April 2006
Final EIS	Late 2006

While we will complete the EIS as soon as possible, our handling of key regulatory topics such as cultural resources, wetlands, or other environmental factors must be properly balanced with schedule. In any event, the above-noted schedule for the EIS will not affect the ultimate expected timeframe for constructing the project. As you may recall, the project is identified in the Mn/DOT long-range plan for beginning construction in the 2015 to 2023 timeframe.

We expect the best time for the next PAC meeting to be in January 2006. At that time, we will preview the Draft EIS with the PAC and with regulatory/environmental agencies and will prepare for the Public Hearing. Please feel welcome to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Peter Harff, P.E. Mn/DOT Project Manager