



The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Speaker Morgan, Navajo Transit System announce arrival of new buses

“This reduction in bus fare was designed to lessen the financial burden on our Navajo people.” — Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. — The Honorable Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan, staff from the Navajo Transit System and the Navajo Division of General Services announced the arrival of brand new buses.

Speaker Morgan, along with staff from the Office of the Speaker, and the Office of the President and Vice President had the opportunity to tour buses purchased recently.

Lee Bigwater, department manager for Navajo Transit System, and Virgil Brown, division director for the Navajo Division of General Services, provided exclusive tours of the buses, before they became part of the main fleet of transportation that services 41 out of the 110 Navajo Chapter communities.

The impressive 40-passenger buses, wrapped with graphics depicting wild mustangs, has many upgraded features that include comfortable reclining seats, DVD players, improved air conditioning and comfort.

Bigwater made reference to the symbolism of the mustang graphics plastered across the buses.

“Traditionally, the Navajos traveled across the land with horses as their main means of transportation,” he explained. “The people view the transit buses now as their horses.”

He explained buses were purchased to replace older ones, which have been breaking down. Current buses have been running for six years or 500,000 miles as recommended by the Federal Transit Administration.

“I give a lot credit to Mr. Bigwater and his staff for their hard work in putting together this package,” Virgil Brown said. “I also thank the Speaker’s Office and the Council for allocating money to make the purchase of the buses a reality for us.”



The Navajo Transit System received new buses with assistance from the Office of the Speaker. Lawrence T. Morgan is pictured surrounded by Navajo Council delegates, staff from Navajo Transit System, the Navajo Division of General Services and the Office of the Speaker. (Photos by Joshua Lavar Butler)



The bus purchases were made possible through a Nov. 4, 2008, memo of understanding between Speaker Morgan and Navajo Transit System. According to the MOU, \$700,000 was given to the Navajo Transit System by the Office of the Speaker to purchase the buses in exchange for a reduced daily bus fare of \$1 for passengers for two-years on existing bus routes.

The agreement reads, "The Navajo Transit System will bear all operational costs during the two-year period and will not require additional funding from the Office of the Speaker."

Speaker Morgan said it was important to take action to help Navajo people curve transportation costs during a time when gas prices were soaring to nearly \$5 per gallon, combined with tough economic challenges on the local, state and federal levels.

"The purchase of these buses is definitely needed for our Navajo people and it was designed to lessen financial burden, while providing them with reliable transportation to help them carry out their day-to-day activities," he said. "I worry about our Navajo elderly spending outrageous amounts of money for fuel to go to town for shopping or for hospital appointments. They may be spending anywhere from \$75 to \$100 on gas, just to drive into their nearby border towns. I am pleased to know this agreement has generated positive feedback from the public and our office looks forward to working on more legislation that will help meet the needs of our Navajo people."



Pictured is Virgil Brown, division director for Navajo Division of General Services, and Lee Bigwater, department manager for Navajo Transit System. Bottom photo, a sign on back of all purchased buses reads, "Thank you Speaker and the 21st Navajo Nation Council."



The \$1 per day bus fare has become very popular and Navajo Transit System has seen an increase in passengers.

"Currently we are still only charging a dollar to ride the bus," Brown said. "We have since seen a huge increase in ridership since the dollar campaign began and the ridership numbers have doubled compared to last year's numbers. Previously, fares had been based on distance between routes and made the cost of round-trips on longer routes more expensive."

The Navajo Transit System, a department operating under the Division of General Services has been operating continuously since 1980 to provide transportation services to the general public within the 27,000-square-mile Navajo Nation and its border towns. Navajo Transit also operates charter bus service throughout the United States.

Funding for the Transit System comes from the state of Arizona and New Mexico, in addition to direct grants from the Federal Transit Administration's Tribal Transit Program.

Navajo Transit System has thirteen routes with new routes added this year, the new routes include: Route 9 from Dilkon, Ariz. to Ganado, Ariz.; Route 10 from Shiprock, N.M. to Fruitland, N.M.; Route 11 from Flagstaff, Ariz. to Tuba City, Ariz. and Route 13 from Window Rock, Ariz. to Crownpoint, N.M. and onto Gallup, N.M.

For information on current closures, schedules, changes and a printable route schedule, access the Navajo Transit System's website at www.navajotransit.com.