



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **Navajo Nation Council approves transfer of Department of Highway Safety to the Navajo Division of Transportation**

WINDOW ROCK – During the second day of their Spring Session, the Navajo Nation Council on Apr. 16 passed two legislations, both relating to the reassignment and transfer of the Navajo Department of Highway Safety under the supervision of the Navajo Division of Transportation.

Legislation No. 0001-13 and Legislation No. 0015-13 were considered simultaneously at the urging of the Office of Legislative Counsel, as both legislations were necessary to enable transfer of the Department of Highway Safety from the under the umbrella of the Navajo Division of Public Safety over to NDOT.

The transfer includes all personnel, funding, and property necessary to maintain full operations of the Department of Highway Safety.

Council Delegate Katherine Benally (Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, Kayenta) was the prime sponsor of Legislation No. 0001-13, the enabling legislation which made changes to the purpose and objectives of Navajo DPS and NDOT under Title II of the Navajo Nation Code.

Since the proposed action entailed Title amendments, it required a two-thirds vote, or sixteen approving votes, of the Council for the legislation to pass, Speaker Naize (Low Mountain, Many Farms, Nazlini, Tachee/Blue Gap, Tselani/Cottonwood) stated prior to the vote.

Council proceeded to vote immediately, passing Legislation No. 0001-13 with a vote of 19 in favor and zero opposed.

“We look forward to having the Department of Highway Safety come into the Division of Transportation,” said NDOT principal civil engineer Darryl Bradley.

The purpose of the second bill, Legislation No. 0015-13, sponsored by Council Delegate Jonathan Nez (Shonto, Navajo Mountain, Oljato, Ts'ah Bii Kin), was to amend NDOT's plan of operation to include the transfer of the Department of Highway Safety under its supervision.

“As I mentioned at our Naabik'íyáti' Committee [meeting], it is similar to the highway patrol in regards to having Navajo Nation law oversight on our Navajo Nation roads,” Delegate Nez said.

“I want to recognize the fruits of the Resources and Development Committee, as well as the Law and Order Committee for recommending this for ‘do pass’ at the Navajo Nation Council level,” Delegate Nez added. “I think this is also another step to really begin to exercise our sovereign status on the Navajo Nation, where we will also be able to oversee our roads on the Navajo Nation.”

Currently, NDOT is working on furthering the inclusion and development of substantial engineering functions for highway safety, said NDOT director Paulson Chaco in regard to his division's addition of the Navajo highway safety entity.

Chaco said major highway safety programs focusing on components such as guardrails and safety audits of highway intersections are in the NDOT's plans to build a more comprehensive highway department.

"When we talk about transportation and safety, we need to figure out how to put some teeth in it. It's good to check guardrails, but we need to go beyond that," expressed Council Delegate Leonard Tsosie (Baca/Prewitt, Casamero Lake, Counselor, Littlewater, Ojo Encino, Pueblo Pintado, Torreon, Whitehorse Lake).

Excess numbers of livestock meandering onto Navajo roads are what Navajo people are concerned about when the topic of highway safety is mentioned, said Delegate Tsosie.

Delegate Tsosie said according to recent statistics provided by the Indian Health Service, accidental deaths on highways have been increasing at a substantial rate, which he attributed to livestock making their way onto roadways.

"If we're going to have a transportation safety department, that has to be taken into account," said Delegate Tsosie, who ultimately stated he supported the legislation, but encouraged NDOT officials to design a "true" highway safety department.

Some Council members, like Council Delegate Kenneth Maryboy (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teec Nos Pos, Tólikan, Red Mesa), also expressed the need to strengthen enforcement of transportation safety regulations on the Navajo Nation.

"Right now, most of the semi-trucks going through the reservation are taking the reservation roads more because there are no restrictions," said Delegate Maryboy, stating that overweight semi-trucks were contributing to quickened deterioration of Navajo roads.

"We can pass this legislation, but if it does not say anywhere 'somebody needs to monitor the roads for the semi-trucks,' then we're going to be back at square one," Delegate Maryboy said.

Law and Order Committee Chair Council Delegate Edmund Yazzie (Churchrock, Iyanbito, Mariano Lake, Pinedale, Smith Lake, Thoreau) said the legislation generated considerable discussion when it was considered by his committee earlier in the legislative process.

Delegate Yazzie said the Navajo Police Department expressed they were overworked during discussion of the legislation, and that it was true that approximately 70 percent of semi-trucks traveling on Navajo roads were overloaded.

"We need to do a legislation to allow our Navajo Nation police to enforce [transportation regulations] on Navajo Nation lands," said Delegate Yazzie, offering the suggestion to his Council colleagues.

The Navajo Nation Council ultimately approved Legislation 0015-13 with a vote of 22 in favor and zero opposed.

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