

Navajo DOT reports before Resources and Development Committee



The Navajo Division of Transportation reported before the 22nd Navajo Nation Council's Resources and Development Committee on October 23, 2012 to discuss issues with road construction activities in the Pinon Chapter area. NDOT staff have recently been subjected to community members brandishing firearms near the project site. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

The Navajo Division of Transportation reported to the 22nd Navajo Nation Council Resources and Development Committee on October 23, 2012 to discuss the project shutdown of Navajo Route 4, near Pinon.

The other road project in the area on Navajo Route 8027 is nearing completion. The decision to stop the project was the result of two incidents involving community members brandishing weapons toward NDOT staff working in the area.

Taft Blackhorse, department manager for Project Management emphasized safety as the priority.

The project was going very well until a staff member reported that one of the drivers had a firearm when their car passed by, Blackhorse explained.

The second incident occurred near the same project when another community member drove near the site with a rifle pointing out the window of his vehicle at NDOT staff. Staff recorded the license plate number and vehicle description.

"We told staff to stop all projects until this matter has been taken care of appropriately," Blackhorse said to the RDC members.

NDOT officials drafted a letter detailing the incident, which was forwarded to the Pinon Chapter. Navajo Police also interviewed staff present during the incidents.

At present time, over \$49 million has been expended for projects in the Pinon area, varying from road construction, maintenance, environmental, and archaeological assessments.

NDOT Fuel Excise Tax funds have also improved dirt roads in the area via the Red Dog Project.

RDC members were not agreeable to such threatening gestures near the construction zone.

Council delegate Leonard Pete (Chinle) said, "I'd like to see how much money and where that was spent in the last year, to give us a better picture.

"There was a lot of money and (NDOT staff) is getting that kind of treatment," he said.

The report from Blackhorse was accepted by the committee by a vote of 4-0.

"Our main concern from our division is not to have our staff harmed in any way, whether mentally or physically," Blackhorse said.

NDOT officials will report before the RDC again on Oct. 30, during the committee's regularly scheduled meeting at the Navajo Nation Council Chamber.