

After 20 years of waiting, Huerfano bridge to be replaced



Officials from Navajo Division of Transportation, Navajo Nation Council, New Mexico Department of Transportation, San Juan County and URS Corporation met in Albuquerque on July 31, 2013, to discuss the replacement of the Huerfano bridge. NDOT is contributing \$1.5 million toward the replacement of the bridge, estimated to cost \$2.3 million. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

ALBUQUERQUE-Officials from the Navajo Division of Transportation, San Juan County, New Mexico Department of Transportation, URS Corporation, and Navajo Nation Council met on July 31, to discuss the replacement of the Huerfano Bridge.

Community members from Huerfano have been asking for a bridge replacement for over 20 years.

The PS&E (plans, specifications and estimates review) meeting took place at the URS corporate headquarters. PS&E review meetings are typically conducted when the plans, specifications and construction cost estimate are approximately 99 percent complete.

URS is the consulting engineer under contract with San Juan County to design the bridge and overall project, prepare construction documents, and monitor construction.

Bridge No. 8105, which carries San Juan County Road 7150 over the Gallegos wash, is in desperate need of repair, especially now with monsoon season in full swing. Commercial vehicles and trucks weighing over 10 tons must travel the detour access

route through the wash for crossing.

The bridge is located approximately 6.3 miles south of Highway 550. Although community members regularly travel on the bridge to get home, the rusty and deteriorating condition of the structure cannot be underscored enough.

The entire structure vibrates whenever vehicles travel across. Although this region of New Mexico is suffering from drought conditions, monsoon rains could easily complicate the bridge matter exponentially if water began flowing through the Gallegos Wash.

The cost estimate to replace the bridge is at \$2.3 million.

NDOT, NMDOT, Federal Highway Administration, San Juan County and the New Mexico Gross Receipts Tax are all contributing agencies for the project. NDOT will provide \$1.5 million in funds to replace the aging structure.

Paulson Chaco, director of NDOT, said the Huerfano bridge project is the first project funded by the direct funding agreement between NDOT and the FHWA, which was cemented in Feb. 2013.

“This is the first time NDOT is taking over the reins from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to complete this project from start to finish. We are utilizing funds from the direct funding agreement for this project,” Chaco said.

In 2013, NDOT became partners with the FHWA and BIA to complete road projects on the Navajo Nation, receiving annual appropriations of \$10 million from the FHWA. BIA receives \$44

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million annually for services on Navajo Nation roads.

Finding the funding for the Huerfano bridge project was the biggest challenge stakeholders had to overcome. To date, development for the bridge has taken over five years, most of the time spent identifying potential funding sources.

Peter Hinckley, principal transportation engineer for URS, said construction of the project is slated to begin Jan. 2014, with construction finished in Oct. 2014.

“The span of the bridge is 356-feet. The average height of bridge deck above natural channel is 11 to 12-feet,” Hinckley said. “The bridge will be constructed of pre-stressed concrete girders on drilled shaft foundations, with a cast-in-place concrete deck.”

During the construction period, the existing bridge bypass will remain open for traffic.

“Bridges are a very important element of our national, regional and local infrastructure that warrant increased funding and upgrading,” Hinckley said.

He said the new bridge will provide a safe route for local residents, school buses and the general public to cross the Gallegos Wash, which is one of the largest ephemeral waterways in San Juan County.

“The new bridge will carry two lanes of traffic instead of the one lane on the old bridge. It will also have shoulders that can be used by pedestrians or bicyclists,” Hinckley said. “The new bridge barrier rail will meet current design standards for both automobile and truck traffic.”

Information: www.navajodot.org



The Huerfano bridge spans a distance of 356-feet and serves approximately 4,000 people in the area. The Bailey bridge has reached its maximum service life through the years. (Photo by Rick Abasta)



Left, signs warn trucks to utilize the access road through the Gallegos Wash. Top, The erosion and rust is evident on the supporting pillars for the Huerfano bridge. The entire structure vibrates heavily when vehicles travel across the span. (Photos by Rick Abasta)

